

بلادنا فلسطين

Palestine, Our Homeland

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Credit: Naser Jafari, Al-Quds Newspaper.



OLIVE BRANCH



CHECKPOINT WITH OMAR & FADI

We begin by giving thanks to God for the blessing of this moment—to tell the story of Palestine as we know it, and to share our perspective of the world as we live it. We speak for our people whose story has so often been silenced, distorted and stolen. From the roots of the olive groves of our ancestral homeland to the exile of the diaspora, Palestinians carry with them the essence of humanity, beauty, and grace. Palestinians rise with an unwavering spirit, patient in sorrow, defiant in hope. It is our deep sense of duty—born of love, memory, and truth—that kindles a light within us, guiding us to stand against injustice and to speak with clarity and courage in the face of silence.

Nelson Mandela once wrote that:

“The oppressed people and the oppressors are at loggerheads. The day of reckoning between the forces of freedom and those of reaction is not very far off. I have not the slightest doubt that when that day comes truth and justice will prevail... The feelings of the oppressed people have never been more bitter. The grave plight of the people compels them to resist to the death the stinking policies of the gangsters that rule our country...”

To overthrow oppression has been sanctioned by humanity and is the highest aspiration of every free man.”¹

Zionism, as a political ideology, seeks to establish and maintain an



exclusive Jewish state in historic Palestine (i.e., from the river to the sea). As a native of the land, from a Palestinian perspective, Zionism is a racist regime whose realization is conditional on the dehumanization of Palestinians and ethnic cleansing of Palestine by the Zionist entity known as Israel.

In the past two years, we have witnessed the unyielding spirit of the people of Gaza while enduring genocide and erasure by the Israeli Zionist regime. Though Palestinians are backed by the truth, international law, and solidarity of those who still hold dear the values of justice and freedom, the world continues to normalize Zionism, and with it, normalize racism.

For over a century, governments and institutions have been two siding genocide in Palestine. Even the establishment of the state of Israel came from a racist perspective: that European Jews have a right to Palestine because of what they have endured during the Nazi holocaust, without any

thought about the inalienable right of Palestinians to their own homeland. The past two years have revealed an uncomfortable truth: a Palestinian’s right to life is conditional on making the Zionist feel safe, on the Palestinian submitting to injustice and giving up their humanity.

This logic is not limited to the West, it is also echoed by authoritarian regimes in the Arab and Muslim world who, in reality, are subcontractors of oppression repeating the same narrative out of political convenience.

A striking example of this is the repeated invocation of the two-state solution” each time the Zionist entity reveals its true face of injustice and brutality. Governments, media outlets, NGOs, and corporate institutions rush to defend this ideological illusion that frames Palestinian self-determination as a privilege, not a right, limited to a mere fraction of our homeland. Rarely do they acknowledge the crimes being

¹ Long Walk to Freedom, The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela. Page | 2





committed or the perpetrator of these crimes: the State of Israel.

Many well-intentioned activists embrace the narrative of state recognition, celebrating it as progress toward justice. In truth, State recognition is not a step towards justice for Palestinians; rather, it is an attempt to save Zionism from itself by claiming that there is some room for justice for Palestine in an international system that was created by imperial colonial powers to control the rights of those oppressed rather than grant them those rights. What they're really saying is, "if Palestinians can be quiet victims, stop resisting oppression, accept the theft of their land, abandon their right of return, and disarm so the Zionist entity (that has been ethnically cleansing Palestinians for a century) can feel safe', perhaps then, we might give them peace".

Canada's Prime Minister, Mark Carney, echoes this sentiment in his repeated calls for a so-called "Zionist-Palestinian state." What does this mean in practice?

This normalization of racism and of Israeli crimes is not confined to politics. It seeps into every arena of life. Despite global pressure from activists, sports bodies, including FIFA, have refused to suspend Israel's team from competitions, blatantly ignoring the overwhelming evidence of war crimes and the International Court of Justice's statement that, "Israel is illegally occupying the West Bank and Jerusalem."² As United Nations experts recently warned,

"Sports must reject the perception that it is business as usual... Sporting bodies must not turn a blind eye to grave human rights violations, especially when their platforms are used to normalise injustices."³

What the world has witnessed in the past two years, what Palestinians have endured for over a century, is not only the denial of a homeland and humanity itself, but the insistence of a world determined to normalize racism, ethnic cleansing, apartheid, and genocide.

Our governments, schools, universities, institutions, and corporations, have all contributed to this normalization. Genocide, racism and apartheid against Palestinian people has been legitimized rather than shamed as a crime against humanity. If you've ever wondered how the world lived on while the Nazi Regime carried a holocaust, or how people cheered on the KKK's violence and lynching of Black Americans, just look at how the world is allowing Israel to steal our lands and kill our people.

This normalization of Israeli state terrorism has forced Palestinians and their allies to water down how they express support for Palestinians. Afraid to be seen as "radical" or "hateful," you will find many of us negotiating with a system that refuses to negotiate with us. In the workplace and classrooms alike, the priority is not to confront Zionism as a racist and criminal ideology, rather, immense effort is made to suppress the discussion of Palestinian suffering, It is referred to as a "conflict" or a

"war," instead of the blatant mass murder of civilians through state-sanctioned violence.

In light of the above, we have decided to write about Palestinian resistance, in many of its forms. This Issue of Palestine, Our Homeland, is an imperfect one, one we struggled with, one that made us realize how deep the arrow of hate pierced our collective consciousness and how tightly the colonial chains still bind our minds. We found ourselves trying to explain, justify, and humanize ourselves for the world; to show them we are peaceful beings undeserving of the inhumanity we face, the erasure of our culture, land, and people. Through this issue, we hope to remind you, as we have reminded ourselves, that the right to life, freedom and dignity is inherent to us as human beings. As you read through the articles, we hope that we have taken a step towards breaking those chains and towards inspiring you to do the same.



² Advisory Opinion of 19 July, 2024; Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices by Israel in the

Palestinian Occupied Territories Including East Jerusalem.

³<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/un-experts-call>

suspension-israel-international-football-amid-unfolding





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RESISTANCE AS PALESTINIAN IDENTITY

Fadi

The Land of Prophets

Imagine placing the prayer mat gently over your shoulder as you make your way through the narrow streets of the Old City of Jerusalem on a blessed Friday.

The city hums with life. Elderly women carry baskets of fresh fruit to sell in the market. From the shops, the recitation of Qur'an pours out into the streets, weaving with the chatter of children and the footsteps of worshippers, all heading to Jumu'ah prayer. In a few days, a similar scene will take place not too far away, but for Christian worshippers.

The smell of warm Jerusalem Ka'ek drifts through the air, its sesame seeds crisp and golden.

You glance to the side and notice an old woman resting on a chair outside a shop, her knees too weak to stand long. The shopkeeper, out of kindness, has placed a row of chairs for the elders, a quiet gesture of mercy in a city built on mercy.

As you continue walking, it hits you: these stones carry the footsteps of prophets. Every archway and courtyard whispers their stories. You are about to enter the sacred land that Allah Himself chose as a gate to the heavens. The second mosque built on earth, the mosque that the mother of Maryam (AS) dedicated her unborn child to serve, where Allah showered Maryam (AS) with His blessings.

You pause, look at the faces beside you—your Muslim brothers and sisters—and a question rises:

“Can you believe there was a time when this land was torn from us, when its people watched helplessly as it was broken apart?”

The thought feels impossible. Unimaginable. Yet, here you stand, heart trembling, soul awake, knowing that what was once lost must one day be restored.

Fighting for Freedom

Palestinians, though rarely celebrated in schoolbooks, have expressed a profound commitment to freedom. The very persistence and steadfastness of Palestinians despite the pain and suffering that makes them unequivocally the people of the land.

In the absence of freedom, Palestinian resistance has its roots in Palestine as deep as its olive trees and is an equal and integral part of the identity of Palestinians. The past century of struggle against an exclusive, racist ideology such as Zionism is not new in Palestine. The resilience and resistance of Palestinians now could only be understood by comparison to their struggle against a very similar exclusive and racist ideology represented by Crusaders occupation of Palestine.

Palestinian resistance against the Crusaders unfolded both within besieged towns and across the countryside, where local groups organized ambushes and defensive operations against the invading forces. Centuries later, Palestinians supported the Muslim armies led by Salahuddin in the broader struggle to reclaim Jerusalem. Those who

were exiled contributed significantly to the intellectual and spiritual revival of the Islamic world, continually reminding Muslims of the centrality of Jerusalem to their faith and identity.

But what motivated Palestinians to resist? I have often tried to articulate my own feelings toward my homeland—especially toward Jerusalem. Some describe Jerusalem as a city that evokes a universal sense of belonging, a place where all faiths and peoples seek to claim a part of its holiness. Yet I believe Jerusalem, and by extension all of Palestine, embodies something deeper—an element inseparable from the sanctity of the land itself.

Heart of Palestinian Resistance: Duty of guardianship

Growing up in Palestine, every step I took through Jerusalem carried a profound sense of belonging, humility, love, contemplation, and above all, duty. Perhaps these emotions are natural for anyone raised in a land where history is continuous and where the traces of prophets remain visible in its stones. Still, the feeling of duty stands apart.

Yes, Jerusalem is home, but it is also a sacred trust for every Muslim. Each step I took in its streets was not only my own—it was taken as a guardian of Al-Aqsa and I had the duty to preserve it. Yet many Palestinians are denied access to this home, the spiritual and emotional heart of our people. Thus, every step I took became an act of duty on behalf of my brothers and sisters across Palestine who





dream of walking those same streets, even under occupation and apartheid.

This sense of duty extends beyond Jerusalem to every pebble and grain of soil in Palestine. Whether consciously or not, Palestinians—within the homeland or in exile—carry this responsibility within their collective identity. It is more than attachment to land; it is a moral and spiritual covenant, binding the people to their history, faith, and the sacred duty of guardianship.

This duty of guardianship also belongs to each Muslim regardless of whether or not they are Palestinian or Arab. It is not tied to ownership rather than a responsibility of care. It is worth noting that the sacred duty of guardianship towards Jerusalem by Muslims extends to the care and preservation of Christian and Jewish holy sites. This is clearly visible in the way Islamic rule treated Christians and Jews in Jerusalem from the time of the Caliph Omar Ben Al-Khattab.

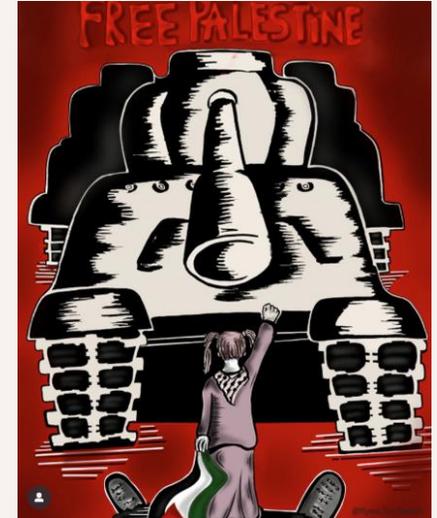
This perspective cannot be fully grasped by the colonizer, for the identity of the Zionist project is defined not through the land itself but in relation to an idea external to it. Even while physically occupying the land, Zionism remains ideologically detached from it. In contrast, the identity of the Palestinian—and, more broadly, of the Muslim—is rooted within the land. It draws nourishment from its soil, memory, and sacredness, even as much of that land has been violently cleansed of its people.

When Zionist leaders pursue the systematic erasure of Palestinians through ethnic cleansing, apartheid, occupation, and genocide, they are not merely attempting to remove a people—they are, in essence, attempting to annihilate the land’s very being. For those Palestinians who understand their history and identity, resistance is not simply a political stance; it is an existential necessity. No measure of destruction can sever a bond so deeply intertwined with faith, memory, and the sacred duty of guardianship.

Palestinians in Gaza and Duty of Guardianship

The recent example of Gaza illustrates this truth vividly. During the latest two-year and two-day genocidal campaign waged against Gaza, many Zionist leaders and settler groups predicted that Palestinians would eventually abandon Gaza. Yet, to their astonishment, the people of Gaza returned—twice. Their return defied the logic of conquest and displacement.

While the colonizer correctly assumed that no human being would wish to live amid sewage and rubble, the Palestinian, whose identity is inseparable from the land, perceives even that rubble as an extension of their own being. The ruins are not merely debris, they are fragments of life, faith, and belonging.



Credit: Flyers for Filastin: made by @ssend0

This is a reality Israel cannot comprehend. To the Zionist imagination, the land is a commodity, a piece of real estate by the Mediterranean, to be purchased, privatized, or purified of its native people. The violence against both land and life is thus





rationalized as part of a divine entitlement, a project to build an exclusive property or a kingdom under the guise of holiness of some humans as being chosen by God and given a free pass to murder and plunder.

For Palestinians, however, the relationship to the land is neither transactional nor possessive. It is ontological. Palestinians belong to Palestine as naturally and as inseparably as angels belong to heaven, a continuous and divinely ordered presence. To challenge that relationship is as futile as attempting to persuade angels that they are something other than celestial beings, or to presume the arrogance of stripping heaven from God and claiming it as property of the Zionist.

This should not be misunderstood as a claim of superiority or exclusivity. The Palestinian does not claim an exalted position in history or scripture. Rather, the Palestinian’s bond with the land stems from an understanding of entrusted guardianship, a covenant of care and moral responsibility. Palestine is not owned; it is blessed, it is protected. Its sanctity demands not possession, but service.

From this vantage point, one can better understand why Palestinians historically accepted and revered prophets such as Abraham, Dawud, and Sulayman, as well as someone such as Omar Ben Al-Khattab, figures who embodied justice and divine stewardship, while rejecting imperial entities such as the Crusaders and, in the modern era, the Zionist project.

It was precisely this same sense of duty and care that animated the Page | 7

Palestinians exiled during the Crusades. Far from disappearing, they became active participants in the intellectual and spiritual renewal of the Islamic world—reminding their contemporaries of the sacred trust of the Holy Land. Their scholarship, devotion, and persistence ultimately contributed to the eventual liberation of Palestine from Crusader control.

VOICES OF RESISTANCE - SALEH AL-JAFARAWI

Dana

وَلَا تَهِنُوا فِي ابْتِغَاءِ الْقَوْمِ ۗ إِن تَكُونُوا تَأْلَمُونَ فَإِنَّهُمْ يَأْلَمُونَ كَمَا تَأْلَمُونَ ۗ وَتَرْجُونَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَرْجُونَ ۗ (104) وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

“Do not falter in pursuit of the enemy—if you are suffering, they too are suffering. But you can hope to receive from Allah what they can never hope for. And Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.” (Surat Al-Nisa, 104).

Saleh Al-Jafarawi lived his life across two breaths, one for the ordinary, human things that make mornings bearable, and another for the stubborn, sacred work of resistance. He walked the streets with the small, private rituals of a man who loved: the quiet prayer before dawn, the way he split his bread with neighbors, the catalogue of village names in his head like a map of memory. Then he stepped outward, into the public business of witnessing: taking notes, taking photos, vlogs, naming what others would bury. He believed that to tell the story was itself an act of survival.

Two days after a ceasefire was announced and one day before his brother Najy would come home from jail (unjustly a prisoner of the enemy), Saleh was murdered. The

calendar does not care for the timing of outrage; it only records that a life dedicated to witnessing was taken. When it happens like that, so close to peace and to reunion, it makes a question flare up and burn: what do we mean by resistance? Is it only the roar? Is it the bullet and barricade? Or is it the stubborn, ordinary work of showing up, of keeping names alive so that forgetting cannot take root?



Credit: The Palestine Project Poster Archives.

When I read the verse above, I feel the strange consolation of faith: that even in the paradox of struggle, there is the claim that hope is ours in ways the enemy cannot inherit. That conviction, that hope can be tended like a garden even in a time of ash, steadies the heart.

Saleh’s story began in the Great March of Return. He limped for a season after bullets tore through his legs, but his limp never became an excuse. His resistance was first of all to expose the truth: to hold a camera to an old woman’s face and let the world see the poem in her wounds, while making her smile.





He famously told younger reporters: “Do not ever leave the resistance groups of Palestine. Support them.” Those words become less an order than a covenant; a claim that the life of the people and the memory of the land are responsibilities not to be abandoned. Ghassan Kanafani’s insistence that “we write for Palestine with blood” is not mere rhetoric; it is the hard metaphor of a people who have turned witness into currency because nothing else will buy them recognition.

And yet the question returns, stubborn as a pebble in a shoe: if there were no resistance, would Saleh, and the likes of Saleh, still be alive? If resistance were silenced, would the name “Saleh” ever have meant anything beyond a private sorrow? Kanafani’s fiction and interviews force us toward the ugly honesty that for some, resistance invites retaliation, and for others, it is the only refusal of erasure. He writes not to romanticize death but to insist that memory and story are themselves weapons against complete oblivion of the Palestinian people.

Resistance is not a single shape. It takes arms and songs, barricades and ballots, kitchens and kebabs, the stubborn pronunciation of a city’s name that occupiers would prefer to muffle. It is a flag stitched into a child’s schoolbag. It is the insistence on knowing the map of your homeland as though you had walked every alley, even if you have only traced it on second-hand maps and in your dreams. I found myself asking a friend the other day, in a casual way, whether al-Aqsa refers to the mosque or the whole compound – a fact I always forget. He said “they try and confuse you,” in his statement, I felt the



architecture of dispossession so well designed by the occupier. So much of Palestine, its olive groves and orange trees, its narrow lanes in Haifa and the breath of salt at Jaffa’s port, exists now in memory and language. My resistance, then, is to learn every inch of that land as if I had walked it; to hold the street names on my tongue and the stories in my mouth until the world cannot pretend those places are unpeopled. Mahmoud Darwish reminds us that even in exile “we have on this earth what makes life worth living”, small, luminous things that tether us to the human. That tether is resistance.

Edward Said taught us to read resistance as both cultural and existential, a refusal to be re-written by someone else’s story. The Palestinian struggle is as much about insisting on the right to narrate one’s life as it is about any diplomatic table. To say, “I am from there,” is to stake a metaphysical claim against displacement; to teach that history is not a footnote but the living soil of identity.

And then there are the political voices, the imperfect and complicated music of leaders who

tried to translate pain into statehood. Yasser Arafat’s words ring with that stubborn lyricism: “I swear to God, I will see [the Palestinian state], whether as a martyr or alive.” What he carried was both threat and hope; the promise that the story of a people would not be erased from the stage of history. His rhetoric, like the rhetoric of all great movements, is double-edged, it can inspire courage and also harden the heart, but it cannot be dismissed because it was built from a yearning the world tried to silence.

So, what is resistance now? In Saleh’s life it was a thousand modest acts strung together like prayer beads: reporting when officials tried to lie, teaching children the names of villages, kissing the forehead of a friend who had lost a son. It is refusing to exchange the truth for comfort. It is the poet who writes a line that becomes a map for ten thousand people; it is the journalist who keeps a camera rolling while the rest of the newsroom looks away. It is the mother who remembers the face of her son.





If there is a single thread that ties every Palestinian who resists in their own way, it is this: hope is stubborn. It takes root in small things, in the word memorized, the olive tree planted, the poem recited at dawn.

I do not romanticize martyrdom. I mourn it. I do not call for blood as a first language; I honor the multiplicity of resistance because the only unacceptable thing is silence. Saleh's murder is not a martyr's badge to be worn lightly; it is a wound that exposes the reality of Palestinian erasure. The Quran verse at the beginning tells us that in faith there is mercy for the striving and a promise that hope belongs to us in ways the oppressor cannot possess. We take comfort where we can, and we act where we must.

So, I vow: to map Palestine from memory if I cannot from feet; to learn the names of towns and the faces of poets. I will teach my children the cadence of those names so that forgetting becomes harder than remembering.

Saleh Al-Jafarawi taught me that resistance is not only rage. It is patience. It is tenderness. It is a litany of small, unglamorous vows kept in the dark. It is saying a name aloud and refusing to let it go.

I close with what the poets have given us, one line, a small lamp in the night:

***We carry the map in our mouths,
and by that speech we turn
memory into homeland.***

RESISTANCE, TRADE AND STATEHOOD: THE LEGACY OF DHAHIR AL-UMAR

Danielle

The 1700s Palestine saw the rise of this spectacular figure who would consolidate power throughout Palestine, from Beirut to Gaza. His story is one of military resistance and conquest, but also one of cunning economic state building that would create an autonomous Palestinian state within the Ottoman Empire. Dhahir al-Umar is the founding father of modern Palestine, and his rule is unique as being independent of both the Ottoman authorities and the local urban elites. Urban elite politics has long been the centre of focus of modern Arab studies; however, the rule of Dhahir al-Umar is an important and unique example of local Palestinian resistance to Ottoman colonial control. Not only because of his resounding success but because of his position in society and how it challenges the urban notable paradigm that has dominated Arab/Ottoman histories of the period.

“Scholars of the modern Middle East are often preoccupied with the history and politics of urban elites and with nationalism and modernities imported from Europe in the 19th century. This approach tends to focus on urban centres and reproduce elite narratives, while ignoring peasant and ‘frontier societies’ and the subaltern and marginalized. This approach also contributes to the silencing of much of Palestinian

history and divesting the Palestinians of their own sense of identity and collective agency.”⁴

What historians like Nur Masalha drive home is the example of the rise of Dhahir al-Umar's power as an evolving 'from within' and 'from below' and actual military resistance to the Ottoman Empire. In this way his rule challenges Albert Hourani's framework of the urban notable paradigm, not disregarding this framework but rather noting that the entire history of Palestine cannot be reduced to one paradigm of elite politics as it does not account for the dramatic emergence of Dhahir al-Umar's rule and his establishment of a *dawlah qutriyyah* (i.e., nation state) in Palestine. Here we will explore his rise to power and how his rule was shaped by a “politics of trade and power”, rooted in new commercial patterns.

Dhahir al-Umar's story begins in the sanjak of Safad, which largely encompasses all the north of Palestine, today known as the Galilee. At this time, we see a budding merchant class emerge both locally and with the presence of European merchants who the Ottoman empire enticed to come and do business by granting them a sort of diplomatic immunity. These capitulations meant that European merchants could live and work within the Ottoman empire but if found to commit a crime they would be tried and judged according to the laws of their home country. Most notable amongst this small group of European merchants, is Paul Maashoek a Dutch merchant who settled in Acre around 1700. He built strong ties with villagers,

⁴ Masalha N. (2018). Palestine : A four thousand year history. Zed. p. 218-219. Page | 9





traders, and even Samaritans in Nablus, introducing practices of forward contracts, advancing cash to peasants for future cotton deliveries. His presence symbolized Europe’s rising role in Palestine’s economy. It was these new commercial patterns introduced by Maashoek in Acre that would shape Dhahir al-Umar’s future rule which also had Acre at its centre.⁵

This small merchant class had to survive within a clan or tribe-based society and their existence was part of a delicate balance of power. Clan leaders had to find a way to acquire their own wealth and where land ownership was elusive there was another avenue that emerged in Palestine, one of tax farming. Clans would essentially bid on their right to administer and collect taxes in their administrative zones on behalf of the empire. They would collect more than what was needed, more than what the sultan actually demanded, and they would keep the rest. A tax farmer in Ottoman Palestine was called a *Multazim*. Dhahir al-Umar was one of those tax farmers that rose in the Zaydani clan.

Cotton exports in Palestine, particularly in Safad, are booming at this time, exports to Europe are in high demand and Palestine was a main source of cotton exports to France. The Ottoman empire exercised their rule of Palestinian sanjaks by appointing Clans to rule on their behalf. It was at this same time that there was a power shift in Safad with the Ottomans removing the ruling Tureibi tribe, possibly looking to exercise more direct control in Safad given the booming cotton economy. However, this



direct Ottoman control never really takes place and instead leaves a power vacuum in Safad, that the Zaydani clan steps in to grab, this is the beginning of the rise of Dhahir al-Umar. He rises to take control of Safad but does not stop there, in his first power move he sets his sights on Nablus. It is in the Majr ibn Amr region that he takes his first military stance against the powerful clans of Nablus and wins. His authority continues to extend into southern Lebanon, where he allied with Nasif al-Nassar, leader of the Matwalis, and Emir Mansur, a Druze notable. These alliances provided both military and political support against Ottoman attempts to curb his power. While he uses his armed militia to back his moves, we are not dealing with just a violent takeover of power. Instead Dhahir al-Umar cunningly uses his experience in taxation and economic development to export his control to neighboring regions and in most cases, he is welcomed by the local communities. Dhahir

monopolized the cotton industry; peasants sold through his system; European merchants had to negotiate with him directly and in turn he reinvested surplus profits locally resulting in the transformation of Galilee towns and coastal communities into urban centres and fostered a new merchant class. He uses capitalism and tax incentives to attract economic development into Palestine, and the result was a huge boom in population, infrastructure and local Palestinian control over the coastal regions and ports.

By 1749 Dhahir al-Umar reached the town of Acre and for the next 30 years made the city his capital. Al-Umar’s *dawlah qutriyyah* in Palestine would transform Acre from a small coastal village “into a fortified and rich metropolitan centre...the newly expanded port of Acre remained the main international gateway to and from Palestine throughout much of the

⁵ Yazbak, M. (2018). Comparing Ottoman Municipality in Palestine:

The Cases of Nablus, Haifa, and Nazareth, 1864–1914. In A. Dalachanis & V. Lemire (Eds.), Ordinary Jerusalem,

1840-1940: Opening New Archives, Revisiting a Global City. P. 703-712.





18th and 19th centuries.”⁶ With Acre’s rise to one of the most important cities not only in Palestine but in al-Sham, it represents Palestine’s reorientation towards Europe in the 18th century, a reorientation that was brought on by a powerful indigenous Palestinian leader.⁷

His religious tolerance was an important part of his success, he was trusted by Palestinian Christian and Jewish communities and under his control these communities flourished and expanded, he oversaw the building of Churches and Synagogues. He fortified and repopulated Tiberias, he invited Jews from Izmir to migrate to Palestine, granting tax exemptions and land. In Nazareth, he expanded the local market, welcoming the Catholic and Orthodox Christian communities which helped strengthen his trade networks. Under his rule Nazareth went from a pilgrimage village of 300 people to over 20,000, along with the construction of numerous churches and monasteries. Dhahir understood how the religious diversity of Palestine was central to growth and modernization, he practiced pragmatic inclusivity and the urban centres thrived.

His economic success is really what allowed him to be tolerated by the Ottoman occupation for as long as they did. Dhahir al-Umar’s consolidation of power certainly carried a certain threat to the empire, but his goal was not to necessarily challenge the empire but to exercise his right to rule on their behalf, his goals then were dynastic in nature rather than



nationalistic. While there can be a desire amongst Palestinians to hail Dhahir al-Umar’s rule as “nationalist”, driven by a need to ‘prove’ a historical basis for Palestinian independence; it is unnecessary. We must become comfortable in reading modern Palestinian history through the eyes of the indigenous people of the time without the need to apply imported concepts. As it is Dhahir al-Umar’s “historical legacy of his self-fashioned and self-governing Palestinian entity and the lasting impact of its policies on modern Palestine as undeniable.” The impact of his power and trade policies were carried forward for generations to come and notably his establishment of a *dawlah qatriyyah* that spanned From the River to the Sea left a legacy of viewing Palestine as a single geo-political entity into the 19th century.⁸ Another legacy about al-Umar’s rule is that while we have discussed his uniqueness at rising from within and outside of the urban elite paradigm; it is his rule and the subsequent massive population growth and booming of urban cities that created the

opportunity for the creation and rise of the urban elite class that would come to play a central role in 19th century Palestine.⁹

Dhahir al-Umar was far more than a provincial strongman; he was the architect

of a distinctly Palestinian polity that challenged Ottoman authority and reshaped the political map of the region. By uniting trade, military force, and inclusive governance, he forged a *dawlah qatriyyah* that gave Palestine coherence as both an economic hub and a cultural homeland. His legacy is not simply one of survival under empire but of vision, creativity, and agency, an indigenous leader who transformed Acre into a gateway to the world and reimagined Palestine as a unified entity “from the River to the Sea.” To remember Dhahir is to recognize that the roots of Palestinian self-rule and collective identity extend deep into the 18th century, carried forward by the lasting imprint of a leader rightfully remembered as the founding father of modern Palestine.



⁶ Masalha N. (2018). Palestine : A four thousand year history. Zed. p. 222.

⁷ Masalha N. (2018). Palestine : A four thousand year history. Zed. p. 224.

⁸ Masalha N. (2018). Palestine : A four thousand year history. Zed. p. 237.

⁹ PreOccupation Podcast: Ep2 pt 3 of 3 - The Founding Father of Modern Palestine



PALESTINIAN TRAUMA, SILENCE AND SUMUD

Shaden

Sitting with my father, attempting to encourage him to discuss my great-grandparents, I could sense the growing frustration and helplessness in his voice and demeanor. Growing up, it was an unspoken rule that certain individuals and subjects were off-limits. Body language, silence, and hushed adult conversations about sensitive topics made it clear: inquiring about the past or difficult present situations was, in a way, forbidden.

It wasn't until I became a mother and embarked on my own journey of self-reflection, seeking to understand my identity through my roots, that I began to delve into my family's history. I soon realized that this silence and reluctance to share complete stories, both good and bad, was not unique to my family. It is a documented phenomenon, a byproduct of generational trauma.

One day, I asked my baba, "What do you know about my great-grandfather, Saleh Ghazal?"

"Nothing," he replied. "My father never spoke of him. The first time I asked about Seedy Saleh was maybe two years ago" (my father is sixty-three now), "and all he said was: 'There's nothing to know. He died when I was young.'"

I then tried to inquire about my grandmother (his mother) who had passed away suddenly in her fifties. "She was a great woman, the light of the house," he responded, his words brief and his tone flat. The more I pressed, the more tense he

became. Eventually, he asked me to stop; he couldn't bear to continue.

This reluctance to discuss the past within the Palestinian community, often marked by silence, grief, or shame, mirrors a broader pattern of generational and communal trauma prevalent among Palestinians and other oppressed groups.

Generational Unprocessed Trauma

For over 78 years¹⁰, Palestinians have lived a continuous struggle of displacement, ethnic cleansing, identity erasure, massacres, and cultural and social fragmentation. These oppressions inflict classic patterns of deeply-rooted trauma that are not only unhealed and unprocessed by past generations, but are still ongoing and festering as they're passed down.

Unprocessed trauma often lingers in the mind and body, surfacing in ways that affect emotions, thoughts, behavior, and physical health. Psychologically, it can manifest as intrusive memories, flashbacks, nightmares, or dissociation, while emotionally it produces mood swings, anxiety, irritability, or emotional numbing. Many cope through avoidance, steering clear of reminders, or through maladaptive strategies like substance use, risk-taking, or compulsive behaviors. Physiologically, trauma can contribute to sleep disturbances, chronic pain, headaches, digestive problems, and heightened startle responses, reflecting how the nervous system stays in "survival mode." Socially, it may appear as withdrawal, mistrust, difficulty with intimacy, or silence around painful histories, which in turn

passes unresolved grief, fear, silence, and cycles of violence to the next generation. In essence, unhealed trauma disrupts a person's ability to feel safe, regulate emotions, and maintain healthy connections, leaving psychological and physical imprints that endure long after the original event.¹¹



Credit: @mop_box.

In the case of Palestinians, the original event is not isolated and isn't nicely tucked away in the past. Furthermore, their trauma is not individualized, but communal, structural, and systemic. It seeps into every aspect of their life and social interactions. Many Palestinians today cannot be pathologized and diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder ("PTSD") because the "post" still hasn't been attained. In fact, psychiatrists, like Dr. Samah Jabr, are trying to reframe the modern study of trauma to include "Chronic Traumatic Stress Disorder ("CTSD")" to recognize not only the perpetuity of the violence that is inflicted on the Palestinian

¹⁰ Though the Nakba occurred in 1948, Palestinian resistance to Zionist and Western oppression began long before that.

¹¹ American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5-TR

(Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2022).





individual and collective, but also its gravity.

This pattern is prevalent among Palestinian refugees living within and without the occupied Palestinian territories. Refugees experience high rates of gender-based violence, child abuse, and community violence. They also live under multiple layers of adversity that are unique to their pockets of the society. Mental health disorders like depression, PTSD, and anxiety are widespread and, with very limited resources, go unaddressed. To add to that, intergenerational trauma from the ethnic cleansing in 1948 and 1967 is transmitted to children through parenting practices, stress, and social conditions.¹²

Yet, illiteracy rates in Palestinian refugee camps are among the lowest in the world. For generations, Palestinians have cultivated a strong tradition of prioritizing education above all else. It is widely viewed as a path to a better future, despite any challenging circumstances. Palestinian refugees have historically set up makeshift schools in camps immediately after their displacement, even up until recently. In fact, when UNRWA began its operations in the region in 1950, it built upon these existing community-led efforts. Very well-renowned authors, poets, musicians, cinematographers, and artists are of Palestinian descent. Many are refugees or descendants of refugees themselves, and they are still emerging today among the

Palestinian youth living under the harshest of conditions. Palestinians have beautifully overcome the impossible challenges by constantly fighting the colonial narrative through literature, writing, collective protests, public debates, journalistic work,¹³ strategic use of their social standing. While many carry the crushing weight of the trauma that they have inherited and are perpetually facing, their stories and lived experiences of surviving as a successful community under impossible conditions is nothing short of exemplary.¹⁴



Credit: *Batool Abuhasan*.

Weaponization of Trauma

Another particularly devastating layer of generational trauma is the societal denial of it. When a dominant power denies atrocities or rewrites and falsely documents

history, survivors are forced to live in a reality where their pain is not only unhealed but also denied. This lack of public truth-telling prevents collective mourning and social repair, making recovery far more difficult. It also teaches the next generation that truth is dangerous and that their story does not matter. This conviction is reinforced when mainstream media confirms it.

Survivors of atrocities like war and dispossession face a system designed to discredit them and their experience. So-called experts present survivors as less sophisticated and incapable of expressing or documenting their stories credibly, often portraying their narratives as emotional, contradictory, or fragmented to dismiss them. This can lead to oversimplification or exaggerated reverence of their histories, compromising accuracy and ultimately encouraging survivors to remain silent, not only due to shame but also disbelief. Palestinian narratives are particularly vulnerable to these attacks, which aim to silence and instill fear, frequently leading to feelings of regret, guilt, and shame among survivors.

After the 1948 war, Israel effectively promoted and marketed this narrative of the “inaccurate and traumatized Palestinian”, by especially focusing on the circumstances surrounding the “flight” of Palestinian refugees. Israel has relentlessly propagated this to both its own citizens and the

¹² UNICEF Lebanon. *Silent Struggles: Mental Health Realities in Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon*. Beirut: UNICEF, March 28, 2024.

¹³ *Journalists in Gaza*, especially in the last 2 years, have been among the primary targets of the Israeli army. Their silencing is part of a broader campaign Israel relentlessly invests in to advance its propaganda. This only Page | 13

underscores the vital role of journalism, and why Palestinians, especially in Gaza, hold their journalists in such deep regard. (Reporters Without Borders. “RSF and Avaaz Launch International Media Operation as Rate of Journalists Being Killed in Gaza by Israeli Forces Soars.” Accessed September 13, 2025. <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-and-avaaz-launch-international-media-operation->

[rate-journalists-are-being-killed-gaza-israeli.](https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.129))

¹⁴ Adel Manna, *Nakba and Survival: The Story of Palestinians Who Remained in Haifa and the Galilee, 1948–1956* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 19, <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.129>.



international community, despite having carried out a campaign of genocide and ethnic cleansing. As Adel Manna explains in his book:

“Israel’s leaders had their own important reasons for propagating that story, and many Jewish researchers and their supporters collaborated in it. Those who perpetrated atrocities and war crimes themselves participated in weaving that tale even though they knew the truth. Those who had committed disgraceful acts against innocent civilians or had given orders to carry them out pretended to forget their role.

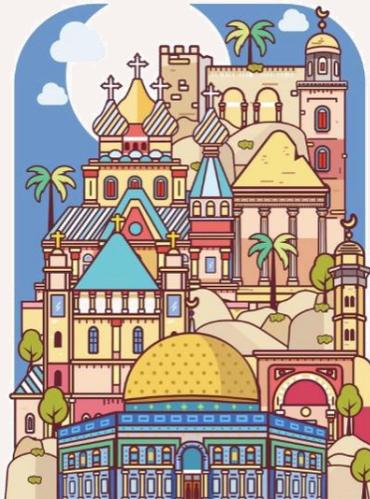
As for the victims, they were in no position to forget what had happened to them, even if they were obliged to suppress their memories and not to divulge them for a period of time. When they did speak out, they were able to recall those events accurately, including intimate and painful details.

One of the eyewitnesses to the events of the Majd al-Krum massacre of 1948 was prepared, in our last meeting, to divulge a detail that others had been ashamed to talk about. In response to a question about the feelings of fear and shock that spread when the men were executed in al-‘Ayn Square, he asked:

What do you think? Many men did it in their pants, and the bad smell began to spread. All we wanted was for the horror show we were seeing to end as quickly as possible. The slow pace of the executions, one every half hour,

doubled the fear that it would be our turn next. Furthermore, the stench that was becoming pervasive undermined our morale. Men who had been squatting for hours did not dare move or speak out of fear of the soldiers’ rifles. So we sat like that for hours at al-‘Ayn Square until Haim Orbach and Shafiq Abu ‘Abdu came. They seemed to us like angels who had descended from heaven to end the torment.”¹⁵

Palestinian generational trauma has been weaponized by oppressors and their allies. It is used not only to justify the killing and displacement of Palestinians from their ancestral lands, but also to silence them, denying their right to narrate their own history by dismissing them as too “damaged” or “traumatized” to speak truthfully. This is precisely why centering Palestinian voices and lived experiences is vital in any process of therapy, healing, and survival through unbearable circumstances.



Credit: Michel Azar.

It also means that Western frameworks and imported “psychoscience” do not always fit

the Palestinian reality, individually or collectively. Dr. Samah Jabr illustrates this through her work with Palestinian torture survivors who seek support. For many, healing is not found in the clinical act of recounting their experiences in a therapist’s chair. Instead, it lies in returning to their families, reconnecting with their communities, moving their bodies, and participating in collective life.¹⁶

In reality, there is so much evidence and recorded oral history from Palestinian victims about their struggle. To say that they do speak up is an understatement. Men, women, and children who come out of Israeli detention centers, still in their grey prison garments, and with fresh wounds on their bodies, face the cameras and tell their stories. They do so despite the very real and immediate threat of being detained again, and of having their families punished. Even as a last breath of resistance in the face of the oppressor, Palestinians do speak up. And the message they are relaying is: “you have hurt me, but you will never kill my spirit.”

Social Fragmentation and Divide-and-Conquer Tactics

Long before 1948, Palestinians were subjected to the same ruthless divide-and-conquer strategies that European colonial powers had perfected on Indigenous peoples across the globe. The apartheid system in Palestine, combined with repeated waves of institutionalized displacement, has the goal of fracturing Palestinian society at every possible level. Those who remain within the borders of historic Palestine are deliberately isolated: confined to Gaza, scattered pockets of the West

¹⁵ Manna, *Nakba and Survival*, 45.

¹⁶ Women on the Line (3CR), “The Radiance of Pain and Resilience with Dr. Page | 14

Samah Jabr,” audio program, September 1, 2025, <https://www.3cr.org.au/womenontheli>

[ne/episode/radiance-pain-and-resilience-dr-samah-jabr](https://www.3cr.org.au/womenontheli/episode/radiance-pain-and-resilience-dr-samah-jabr).





Bank, Jerusalem, or the so-called “48 Lands” (now the state of Israel). Over generations, each of these communities has developed its own lived trauma, legal status, and existential struggle.

This fragmentation has also been reinforced by the differential treatment of religious groups, a classic divide-and-conquer tactic used since the beginning of Western involvement in the region. Druze communities are often spared, some Christians may be treated with relative leniency as long as they don’t oppose the Zionist project, while Muslims (and remaining Christians) bear the harshest repression. Such divisions are not coincidental, as they serve the deliberate colonial aim of weakening collective identity and smoothing the path for expansion.

Legal and Administrative Tools of Separation

Since Israel’s establishment in 1948, successive governments have entrenched this fragmentation through a complex web of laws, policies, and military practices designed to privilege Jewish Israelis at the expense of Palestinians.¹⁷ The methods differ across territories, but the intent remains the same: to separate Palestinians from one another and from their land.

One of the clearest examples is the identity card system. Palestinians are divided by birthplace into West Bank IDs, Gaza IDs, and Jerusalem IDs, each color-coded and each determining rights, freedoms, and restrictions.¹⁸ This bureaucratic

control is reinforced by military checkpoints, the most sophisticated surveillance technologies in the world (including facial recognition), and armed enforcement, ensuring Palestinians remain fragmented, dispossessed, and deprived of basic social and economic rights.

This system invades even the most ordinary aspects of life. Attending a wedding, funeral, or community gathering requires navigating checkpoints and permits. Children live under constant threat of arrest, often accused of “stone-throwing,” a pretext for administrative detention without legal recourse or end in sight.¹⁹ In heavily segregated areas of the West Bank, movement is choked by roadblocks, settler outposts, and military patrols.

Palestinians in the ‘48 Lands, though nominally Israeli citizens, are alienated in every aspect of public life. For instance, they are expected to participate in Yom HaZikaron, Israel’s Memorial Day for soldiers and victims of “terrorism.” In very clear terms, the “terrorism” is understood to be Arab violence. Anything short of participating in the two minutes of silence, standing up from your seat, and showing your feigned remorse during this so-called tribute is considered anti-national, and in today’s climate, could be considered sympathy to terrorism itself. Arab Israelis end up humiliatingly hiding out in the restrooms during this charade, or participating in it. Any expression of solidarity or resistance can, at best, get you your Israeli citizenship revoked. With it goes

your freedom to work, to live in certain areas, to own property, and so on; and at worst, arrested and convicted.²⁰

Decades of such compounded aggressions leave deep scars on Palestinian development, both individual and collective. When memory is distorted, social ties fractured, and silence enforced, an identity crisis inevitably emerges. Palestinians are forced into an internal struggle: whether to shed parts of their identity to survive, or to embrace it defiantly in the face of hostility. However, because resistance is woven into Palestinian identity itself, every act of cultural expression, from wearing a *Kuffiyeh* to teaching a child their ancestral village name, becomes an act of resistance, and therefore a threat to the colonial project.

Fragmentation in the Diaspora, the Case of Jordan

The effects of fragmentation are not limited to the Palestinians within Occupied Palestine (i.e., historical Palestine), but it also extends into the diaspora, where each community’s lived experience is shaped and reshaped by the sociopolitics of the countries in which they reside. For instance, a large number of Palestinian refugees have ended up in Lebanon and Syria after 1948, and were not granted citizenship or residency rights, and no mechanisms were instilled for them or their descendants to attain any. This meant that Palestinian refugees living in those countries remained in refugee camps, with little to no resources, and the cost of any social

¹⁷ Amnesty International. Israel’s Apartheid against Palestinians. London: Amnesty International, 2022.

¹⁸ There are three types of identification cards used in Palestine that are given to each person depending on their place of birth: the West Bank ID and Gaza ID,

both in green or orange casings, and the Jerusalem ID in a blue casing.

¹⁹ Palestinians in the occupied territories are subject to a different legal system than Israelis. This means that when a Palestinian, minor or adult, is arrested, they go before a military

court rather than a civil court proceeding.

²⁰ “Israel Convicts Palestinian Poet for ‘Incitement to Violence,’” *Middle East Monitor*, May 4, 2018. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180504-israel-convicts-palestinian-poet-for-incitement-to-violence/>.





upward mobility was shedding their Palestinian identity.

This tension cannot be separated from the broader colonial legacy of the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, in which Britain and France divided the region into spheres of influence without consulting its people. The creation of new and imposed nation-states forced regimes to invent distinct national identities within their newly drawn borders. But in doing so, they often defined these identities in contrast to *Palestinianness*. The presence of displaced Palestinians complicated national projects in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, making them both a reminder of colonial injustice and a perceived obstacle to consolidating fragile new states.



Jordan, in particular, is a striking example. After annexing the West Bank to Jordan in 1950 and the Naksa in 1967, Jordan granted Jordanian citizenship to Palestinian refugees within its territory. Although it prides itself as the only country to do so, Jordan’s policy of “*Jordanization*” deliberately suppresses Palestinian identity, banning the word *Palestine* from official documents in

1950 and promoting the kingdom as a “little Arab homeland.” At the same time, Palestinians were politically marked as refugees with a “right of return,” upheld by UN Resolution 194 and symbolized by UNRWA’s presence. This duality created a contradictory existence: citizens of Jordan on paper, yet perpetual refugees in memory and lived reality.

The Jordanian monarchy initially supported Palestinian resistance, even arming the Palestinian Liberation Organization (“PLO”) in battles like Al Karameh in 1968. But when the PLO’s growing influence threatened Hashemite authority, which was the glue that held Jordan together as a newly established nation-state, that alliance crumbled. The events of Black September in 1970, where the Jordanian army fought the PLO, killing and expelling thousands, exposed the limits of Palestinian resistance within a host state. Since then, Jordan has increasingly normalized ties with Israel, cracked down on dissent, and restricted even symbolic acts of defiance against Israel.²¹ The irony today is striking: the fast food chain McDonald’s has nearly disappeared from Jordan due to the intensity of the boycott led by the BDS movement, yet Hamza Khader, head of the movement, was arrested in Amman earlier this year for social media posts critical of the regime.²² And so the pattern is clear: resistance is tolerated only so long as it does not threaten the

monarchy’s alignment with Israel and its Western allies.

Refugee camps, housing nearly a fifth of the refugee population in Jordan, became the starkest symbols of this contradiction. Camps are not only places of poverty and marginalization, but places that house guardians of Palestinian memory. Within them, Palestinians have preserved stories of villages, safeguarded keys and deeds, and taught new generations about the homeland they had never seen. While Jordan’s policies seek to assimilate Palestinians into a new identity, the camps have incubated an alternative one, rooted in exile, resistance, and the refusal to forget, otherwise known as steadfastness or *Sumud*.²³

For many Palestinian families, silence became a deliberate choice. Parents often prioritize survival and stability for their children, knowing that speaking out in ways that are not merely symbolic could jeopardize their future. Outwardly, they accept the constraints imposed on them, keeping public loyalty to the monarchy and suppressing open displays of *Palestinianness*. Inwardly, however, they have preserved memory and identity, teaching their children their roots, passing down the stories of their past, and instilling pride in their Palestinian identity. An interesting example is how it is common that many family names in Jordan reflect Palestinian villages to mark the family roots of Palestinian-Jordanians.²⁴ In this way, silence is not erasure but

²¹ In recent times and on several occasions, the Jordanian army was deployed to guard the Israeli embassy in Amman during peaceful protests and marches, presented to the public as a simple ‘security measure.’ Many demonstrators were arrested. Surveillance also extends online: social media activity (likes, shares, or critical posts) is heavily monitored, and Page | 16

Jordanians live with the very real fear that ‘oversharing’ or criticizing the monarchy could lead to detention or interrogation by the mukhabarat, the kingdom’s intelligence agency.

²² “Jordan Arrests BDS Leader Hamza Khader over Pro-Gaza Activism.” *The New Arab*, August 2025.

²³ PalQuest. “Palestinians in Jordan, 1948–1967.” Accessed September 13,

2025.

<https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/6586/palestinians-jordan-1948-1967>.

²⁴ For example, many of my family members living in Jordan and other countries have taken on the family name Al Siffarini, meaning “the one from Siffarin”. Siffarin is my family’s village of origin in Palestine.





strategy: a way to endure, to protect the next generation, while ensuring that the memory of Palestine would never be lost.

Sadly, though, for many others in the diaspora, the choice is easier: to let the Palestinian cause fade into something historical and figurative, to be observed and studied from afar. Perhaps out of fatigue of bearing the burden of their ancestors' plight, or out of conviction that the comfort of silence and inaction will last, they turn the page, choosing to live their lives, travel, eat, and carry on as though nothing is happening to ethnically cleanse them or their brothers and sisters in Palestine. When challenged, these same people will parrot, with anger, the self-deprecating propaganda of Israel and its colonial allies to justify their inaction. This behavior becomes a coping mechanism to avoid confronting the pain of reality: you cannot escape your *Palestineness* and you cannot escape that the fact that you are the object of colonial oppression and assimilation whether you like it or not. What you think is agency and freedom are in fact colonial shackles that you cannot break free from despite your delusion.

In general, though, there is a stark contrast between Palestinians in occupied Palestine and those in the diaspora. Inside Palestine, defiance is immediate and urgent, born from the reality of having nothing left to lose and that inaction means imminent death and successful ethnic cleansing. In the diaspora, silence plays another role. Refugee camps have become both lifelines and tools of restraint. They have become spaces where silence is not only imposed by fear but also embraced as a form of comfort. Within this space, Jordan has

allowed a kind of advancement for Palestine on the philosophical and economic level: many Jordanian-Palestinians still support their families in Palestine financially, and some strategically use their status and resources to advance Palestinian interests within the diaspora.

These contrasts reflect exactly what 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi described in *The Nature of Tyranny*. Tyranny, he argued, does not just deny rights. It reshapes behavior, conditioning people into silence and complacency as survival strategies. The Palestinians in Jordan and elsewhere, in one way or another, embody this paradox: outwardly subdued, inwardly defiant. Thus, *Jordanization* produced what might be called a "qualified assimilation." Palestinians became central to Jordan's economic and civic life, and make up a majority of the population, yet they remain socially and politically set apart. Tyranny molded them into compliance, but it could not erase the memory of Palestine.²⁵

Silence and *Sumud*

Silence, in the microcosm of the nuclear family, can be a manifestation of trauma and a mechanism of survival and protection. It could also simply be a comfortable delusion that allows for some a "way out" of bearing the historical baggage that comes with being Palestinian. On the other hand, silence is a tyrannical tool meant to squash any form of resistance, whether armed or unarmed. Many Palestinian authors, thinkers, poets, and other unarmed activists have been either assassinated or detained and silenced forcefully over the

generations for speaking up about Palestine.

What's unique about Palestinians, regardless of their lived traumatic experiences across space and time, is that they share *Sumud* in their very identity. Since the time of the Crusades, Palestinians have resisted and have remained steadfast in their lands and their convictions. Our identity is not just *Tatreez* and cooking. It is speaking up against tyranny, rising up against imperialism, and fighting back against injustice. Our *Sumud* is at the core of the Palestinian reality and is a defining feature of it. This is why Palestinians are difficult to occupy and why any expression of the Palestinian identity seemingly poses a threat to Israel. A *Kuffiyyeh*, a flag, a watermelon, a *drawing* of Handala, just by association to the Palestinian identity, are considered resistance and by extension a threat to the oppressive colonial project.



These expressions are more than symbols. They tell the story of Palestinian past and endurance. They testify to survival and to memory. They unsettle the colonial project because they make visible

²⁵ "The Palestinians in Jordan, 1948–1967," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1995): 46–61.





what it tries to bury: the atrocities committed against us which they will one day have to answer for. Our existence, both in lived reality and in memory, stands as an indictment. And when history demands accountability, it is that very existence which will haunt Israel and its allies until justice is served.

The misconception that Palestinians in Arab host nations are not "actively speaking up" is based on a narrow, Western-centric definition of resistance. Peaceful protests fortify the docile image of the colonized. They can resist and protest within the confines of the mold crafted for them by their colonizers and the tyrannical regimes they live under. Once they break out of that mold and disrupt the system, they are branded as terrorists and automatically become outliers of civilization. This makes it easier to dehumanize them and brand them as animals, barbarians, and terrorists, which in turn manufactures consent for their elimination.

What is often misread as inaction is, in reality, another form of resistance. Palestinians inside and outside of Palestine endure by adapting to the constraints imposed on them: navigating surveillance, censorship, poverty, exclusion, attacks on their very identity. Their resilience lies in the refusal to vanish: in existing, in preserving memory, in sustaining families and communities, and in maintaining a Palestinian identity against all odds. This everyday persistence, resisting erasure while living under suffocating limits, is itself an act of profound defiance. Even those who are in self-denial cannot shed their Palestinian identity entirely no matter how hard they try.

Even in impoverished refugee camps, where the daily struggle to secure food, water, and healthcare

overshadows the possibility of large-scale public activism, resilience takes shape in quieter but equally powerful ways. The slow, steady adaptation and improvement of life under impossible conditions is what makes Palestinians so enduring. Even if the aim by the tyrannical regimes they live under is to keep them simply "existing", they strive and manage to surpass that state against all odds. This strength is inseparable from faith and values, held tightly, not just figuratively but embodied in daily choices and behavior, making Palestinians an exemplary nation of resisters against tyranny.

Sumud is more than a slogan, it is a way of life. It is staying on one's land, refusing to leave, and enduring hardship to defy the colonial project of displacement and erasure. It is resistance through education, through family and community ties, through culture, and simply through existence itself. *Sumud* is a multi-dimensional spectrum of Palestinian defiance. Seen in this light, the supposed "silence" is an illusion. Resistance is deeply embedded in Palestinian daily life, even when it does not take the form of armed struggle or street protest.



Credit: @bint.quds.

This is why it is of utmost importance to center Palestinian voices when it comes to the

Palestinian struggle. For their words and their silences carry the memory of dispossession and the weight of generational trauma. Palestinians are not numbers, and their oppression is not a thing of the past. To amplify their voices is to resist Israel's ongoing project of erasure and its allies' attempts to rewrite history. The struggle for Palestine is not only about one people, but about the precedent being set for humanity: a future where colonial violence and authoritarian control are normalized. To listen to Palestinians is to stand against that future, and to affirm that their steadfastness, *Sumud*, remains at the heart of justice.

The genocidal assault on Palestinians in Gaza since October 2023 has torn away the veil concealing the networks of global oppression. It has exposed how systems of domination in the West and East are intertwined, and how the legacies of colonialism and racial violence converge in the ongoing subjugation of Palestine. The question of Palestine cannot be separated from the greed of global superpowers, driven by the pursuit of profit and control at the expense of Indigenous and Black lives, nor from the corruption of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, Africa, and within the so-called democratic West. These powers all operate within the same machinery of exploitation, cloaked in the language of "civilization," "security," and "democracy."

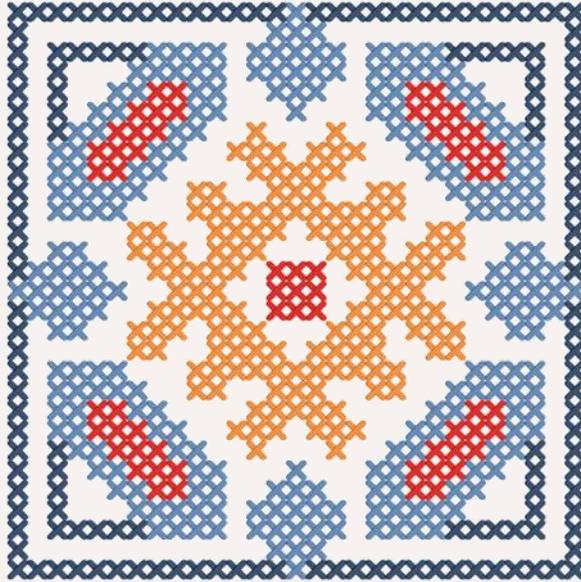
Every one of us is besieged by this system, not only the people of Gaza. International law has become a mask for injustice, a mechanism that legitimizes oppression and shields Zionism and Western interests from accountability. Gaza has shattered the illusion that silence keeps anyone safe. Arab dictatorships have always feared their own people most, turning





their armies inward to suppress dissent rather than to defend justice. For decades, Palestinians across the region, especially in Jordan, have survived by mastering the art of quiet endurance. *Sumud* once meant holding on, building a life within imposed limits, and protecting one's family while the world turned away. But Gaza's devastation has ruptured that fragile sense of safety. Silence no longer shields; it exposes the moral cost of inaction. Quiet survival is no longer enough.

The new generation of Palestinians faces a choice: to continue surviving within the narrow boundaries drawn for them, or to redefine *Sumud* as active solidarity and moral refusal. To speak, to write, to protest, to remember, without fear of surveillance and reprimand are now the forms of steadfastness that challenge tyranny and resist erasure. In this redefinition, endurance becomes defiance, and survival itself transforms into resistance. Gaza has reminded the world that the Palestinian struggle is not only a fight for land, but for truth, dignity, and the right to exist without apology. Breaking the imposed silence is no longer an act of courage, it is an act of justice. And in that refusal to be silent, *Sumud* becomes what it was always meant to be: the heartbeat of a people who refuse to disappear.





HISTORICAL ROOTS OF RESISTANCE

Fadi

Introduction

The reality may seem dark. The Zionist state is in a state of self-proclaimed glory. Most of the land is ethnically cleansed, the West Bank annexation nearly complete, and Gaza is all but reduced to rubble. This is the reality offered to Palestinians. The world reaction is to ensure that Palestinians are prohibited from resisting this state terrorism committed by Israel.

Despite decades of documentation by human-rights organizations - from Amnesty International to Human Rights Watch to Israeli groups like B'Tselem - the global discourse remains distorted. Western governments that celebrate the American Revolution or the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa often condemn Palestinian resistance as illegitimate. The United States, itself born of armed rebellion, supplies billions in military aid to maintain Israel's occupation.

The hypocrisy is glaring. When Ukrainians take up arms to resist Russian invasion, they are hailed as heroes. When Palestinians resist Israeli crimes of occupation and genocide, they are labeled terrorists. The difference lies not in the principle of self-defense but in geopolitics: Israel is a key Western ally, and Palestinians are Arab, Muslim (or Muslim looking), and colonized.

This essay argues that Palestinian resistance, whether expressed through mass protest, cultural preservation, armed struggle, or the simple act of remaining on the

land is a legitimate and necessary response to a century of colonial invasion. Far from being a relic of the past, resistance remains the living core of Palestinian identity, a bridge between generations, and a beacon of hope for all peoples struggling against domination. To understand this resistance, we must first trace the historical forces that gave birth to it.



Credit: Mohammed Hassona.

Mental Colonization and the Fight for Self-Definition

Colonialism does not merely occupy land; it seeks to colonize the mind. Frantz Fanon, analyzing the French occupation of Algeria, warned that the greatest victory of the colonizer is to make the colonized doubt their own humanity. Palestinians face a similar psychological assault. Western media routinely frame their resistance as “terrorism,” erasing the context of occupation. Politicians demand that Palestinians renounce violence without ever demanding that Israel renounce colonization.

This mental colonization breeds despair, self-doubt, and

fragmentation. Some Palestinians internalize the oppressor's narrative, believing that their struggle is futile or morally suspect. Yet resistance is “the most human reaction.” To reject the occupier's story and assert one's own is a first step toward liberation.

Education, art, and historical memory play a crucial role in this process. Palestinian historians painstakingly document every destroyed village, every massacre, every confiscated orchard. Teachers in refugee camps transmit the stories of grandparents who once harvested wheat in Lyd or Yafa. Each lesson, each poem, each oral history is a shield against erasure.

Perhaps the most profound form of resistance is the simple decision to remain. In Gaza under the threat of genocide or being starved by the Zionist regime or in villages like Sheikh Jarrah and Masafer Yatta, families rebuild homes demolished by Israeli bulldozers, plant new olive trees where old ones were uprooted, and send children to school despite checkpoints and harassment. This quiet steadfastness—known in Arabic as *Ribat* or *Sumud*—says to the occupier: You may control the land for now, but you cannot control our will to exist.

Resistance as a Law of Nature

“No man thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism, as well as abilities, of the very worthy gentlemen who have just addressed the House,” declared Patrick Henry in 1775, before offering the immortal cry:

“There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations, and





who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable--and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come.

It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace-- but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?

Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take;

but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"

Henry's words, spoken in a colonial assembly on the eve of the American Revolution (the irony is clear), echo across time and geography. They remind us that resistance is not the monopoly of any single nation or era. It is a human instinct, a law of nature. When a people are invaded, dispossessed, and dehumanized, the refusal to submit is not a political hobby, it is an existential necessity. In the end, as Nelson Mandela once said:

"A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred; he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away

someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity."²⁶



Credit: Issam Ayash.

For Palestinians, resistance is precisely this: the unavoidable response of a people forced to defend their very right to exist. Western media often frames Palestinian resistance as irrational violence, terrorism, or religious fanaticism. Yet to Palestinians, resistance is as natural as breathing. It is the defense of existence against a settler-colonial project designed to erase them.

The Imperial Carve-Up: Sykes-Picot and Balfour

The modern Palestinian tragedy begins in the smoke-filled rooms of European imperial diplomacy. In 1916, as the First World War raged, Britain and France secretly negotiated the Sykes-Picot Agreement. This pact divided the Ottoman Empire into zones of European control, ensuring that the Arab world would not emerge from the war as a unified, independent region. The ink on Sykes-Picot was barely dry when, in 1917, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, promising a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, a land Britain did not own and whose indigenous inhabitants were not consulted.

Missing from these documents was the voice of the people who had lived on the land since it was known to humanity. At the very moment when Arab intellectuals were imagining a post-Ottoman future, debating whether a new Arab nation might rise from the ashes, European powers decided otherwise. They armed local elites who favored small, dependent "nation-states," sowed division, and imposed artificial borders that still fracture the region today. Palestine was singled out for an even more radical fate: not merely colonization, but a project of erasure and replacement. Unlike typical colonial schemes, the Zionist project aimed to transplant a European population onto the land and to erase, rather than merely dominate, the indigenous people.

²⁶ Long Walk to Freedom, The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela. Page | 21





Zionism as Settler-Colonialism: Logic of Elimination

To understand why Palestinian resistance is inevitable, one must first understand the character of the force that seeks to displace them. Zionism emerged in late-19th-century Europe as a nationalist movement responding to anti-Jewish persecution. Its early leaders, however, were steeped in the colonial logic of their age. Theodor Herzl, the movement’s founding figure, openly courted imperial powers and framed the proposed Jewish state as a “rampart of Europe against Asia.”

Unlike ordinary colonial ventures, which aim to exploit native labor and resources, settler-colonial projects seek to replace the indigenous population. From North America to Australia to French Algeria, the pattern is consistent: settlers arrive not simply to rule, but to make the land their exclusive home. The presence of the native is therefore a permanent “problem.” Patrick Wolfe, the historian of settler colonialism, summarized it bluntly: “Invasion is a structure, not an event.” Zionism fits this model perfectly.

From its earliest settlements in Ottoman Palestine, Zionist strategy focused on land acquisition and the creation of a demographic majority. The Jewish National Fund forbade the sale or lease of its land to non-Jews. Early Zionist leaders like David Ben-Gurion spoke candidly of the need to “transfer” Arabs out of the territory. Realizing that colonization through land acquisition was impossible, this logic had hardened into systematic

expulsions, mass killings, and the demolition of entire villages. What Palestinians call the Nakba was not a tragic accident of war but the fulfillment of a program designed to achieve a Jewish majority through the erasure of a native society.

Today, the same settler-colonial logic drives the expansion of illegal settlements across the West Bank, the annexation of East Jerusalem, and the genocidal siege of Gaza. Each new settlement outpost, each demolition order, each “security” wall is not a temporary security measure but a permanent claim: this land is ours; your existence is provisional. In such a context, Palestinian resistance is not merely political but ontological, a defense of being itself.



Credit: Flyers for Filastin, @kelly_og

The British Mandate and Early Resistance

Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, Britain assumed the Mandate for Palestine, administering the territory from 1920 to 1948. The purpose of the Mandate was to enact the Balfour Declaration. As such, Britain

facilitated massive Jewish immigration, armed Zionist militias, helped establish settlements on stolen land, and suppressed Palestinian political movements. Palestinians petitioned, protested, and organized general strikes. They appealed to international law, only to be ignored or betrayed.

The Nabi Musa Revolt in 1920 marked the first mass uprising against Zionism and British colonial rule in Palestine. It erupted in Jerusalem during the annual Nabi Musa festival which was then the largest Muslim gathering in the country. Since at least the early Ottoman period, thousands of worshippers would gather in Jerusalem on the Friday preceding the Christian Orthodox Good Friday, before embarking on a twenty-one-kilometer walk eastward to the shrine believed to contain the tomb of Prophet Musa (Moses), nestled in the barren hills of the Jerusalem area wilderness.

Over the centuries, the festival had evolved, reshaped by the changing rhythms of time and society. Yet, it was the uprising of 1920 that cemented the Nabi Musa festival in the Palestinian national consciousness, transforming what was once a purely religious celebration into a symbol of collective defiance and awakening.

The Buraq Revolt of 1929, was another defining moment in the early struggle against Zionist encroachment. The spark was lit when newly arrived Zionist terrorist groups staged a provocation at the Buraq Wall (today known by some as the Western Wall) chanting “the wall is ours” despite it being under Muslim administration. This demonstration coincided with the



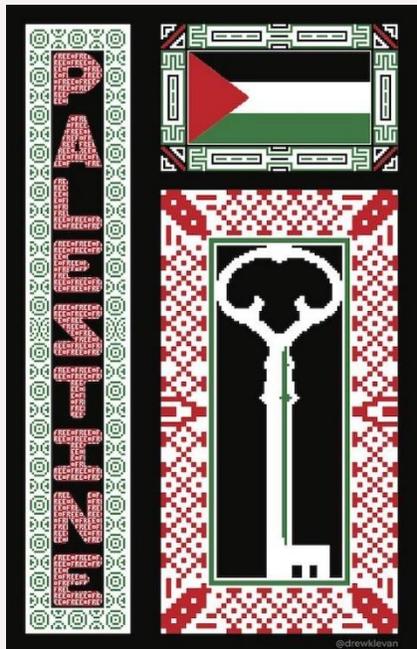
Mawlid remembrance (commemoration of the birth of Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H.), and it ignited widespread protests that spread from Beer al Sab' in the south to Safad in the north.

The British, siding with the Zionists, ultimately stripped control of the Buraq Wall from the Palestinian Muslim administration and handed it to the Zionists. Additionally, public executions were held for the Palestinian leaders of the revolt - Ataa al-Zir, Muhammad Jamjoum, and Fuad Hijazi. Before their executions, the three martyrs left a moving will urging Palestinians to remember their sacrifice, remain united and steadfast, to continue the struggle for liberation, and call on Arab leaders to support Palestine rather than trust foreigners.

The Buraq Revolt became a turning point. For the Zionist movement, it served as a blueprint for future actions, the systematic takeover and desecration of Muslim and Christian holy sites across Palestine. For Palestinians, it revealed the limits of peaceful protest under colonial repression and inspired a new phase of resistance, armed resistance, which culminated in the Great Revolt of 1936.

We had no alternative to armed and violent resistance. Over and over again, we had used all the nonviolent weapons in our arsenal — speeches, deputations, threats, marches, strikes, stay-aways, voluntary imprisonment — all to no avail, for whatever we did was met by an iron hand. A freedom fighter learns the hard way that it is the oppressor who

*defines the nature of the struggle, and the oppressed is often left no recourse but to use methods that mirror those of the oppressor. At a certain point, one can only fight fire with fire.*²⁷



Credit: Drew Levan.

The Great Revolt of 1936-1939

The Great Revolt of 1936–1939, was a nationwide uprising that united workers, peasants, and intellectuals in a determined struggle against British colonialism and Zionist expansion. The Great Revolt erupted in response to the growing presence of European Jewish settlers - seen by Palestinians as a deliberate project to steal their lands. Moreover, Palestinians felt an increased Arab and Muslim abandonment of Palestine. By this time, it has become apparent that the British Mandate existed as a vehicle to erase Palestinians, arm settlers,

and continue to deny Palestinians any rights.

What began as a general strike soon evolved into an armed revolt that swept across the country. For three years, Palestinians waged a fierce struggle for freedom and dignity, despite the immense imbalance of power. The Revolt was crushed with overwhelming British force. Thousands were killed, villages were demolished, and leaders were exiled or executed.

As Ghassan Kanafani put it (1936 Revolt):

The process of establishing the roots of colonialism and transforming it from a British mandate into Zionist settler colonialism as we have seen, reached its climax in the mid-1930s, and in fact, the leadership of the Palestinian nationalist movement was obliged to adopt a certain form of armed struggle because it was no longer capable of exercising its leadership at a time when the conflict had reached decisive proportions. A variety of conflicting factors played a role in inducing the Palestinian then-leadership to adopt the form of armed struggle – firstly: the Izz al-Din al-Qassam movement; secondly: the series of failures sustained by this leadership at a time when they were at the helm of the mass movement, even with regard to the minor and partial demands that the colonialists did not usually hesitate to yield to, in the hope of absorbing resentment (the British took a long time to see the value of this maneuver; however,

²⁷ Long Walk to Freedom, The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela. Page | 23





their interests were safeguarded through the existence of competent Zionist agents); thirdly: Zionist violence (the armed bands, the slogan of “Jewish labor only”, etc.) in addition to colonialist violence (the manner in which the 1929 rising had been suppressed).

In any discussion of the 1936-1939 revolt, a special place must be reserved for Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam. In spite of all that has been written about him, it is not too much to say that this unique personality is still really unknown and will probably remain so. Most of what has been written about him has dealt with him only from the outside and because of this superficiality in the study of personality, several Jewish historians have not hesitated to regard him as a “fanatical dervish”, while many Western historians have ignored him altogether. In fact, it is clear that it is the failure to grasp the dialectical connection between religion and nationalist tendencies that is responsible for the belittling of the importance of the Qassamist movement.

However, whatever view is held of al-Qassam, there is no doubt that his movement (12-19 November 1935) represented a turning point in the nationalist struggle and played an important role in the adoption of a more advanced form of struggle in confrontation with the traditional leadership which had become divided and splintered in the face of the mounting struggle.²⁸

Yet these revolts demonstrated a crucial truth: Palestinians

understood from the outset that Zionism was not a benign refuge for the persecuted, but a racist, colonial movement backed by imperial power. They grasped that endless petitions would not halt dispossession.

Nakba: Catastrophe and



Exile

In 1948, Zionist militias declared a new state, the State of Israel and proceeded to ethnically cleanse more than 750,000 Palestinians from their homes in what Palestinians call the Nakba—the catastrophe. Hundreds of villages were destroyed, their names erased from maps, their stones repurposed to build the new state. Massacres were committed, as they continue to be, in order to create an exclusive Jewish home on exclusive Palestinian lands. Those who remained inside the borders of the new Israel became second-class citizens under military rule; those exiled became stateless refugees in camps in Gaza, the West Bank and across the neighboring Arab countries.

The Nakba was not a single event but Israel’s ongoing process of ethnic cleansing, illegal occupation, apartheid and genocide. Subsequent wars in 1967 and 1973, the annexation of Jerusalem, the settlement of the West Bank, and

the siege of Gaza all advanced the same objective: theft of land, erasure of a people. Each wave of Israel’s state terrorism was met with Palestinian resistance—sometimes armed, sometimes diplomatic, always rooted in the refusal to disappear.

First and Second Intifada

The First Intifada, which began in December 1987, was a mass Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It ignited long-simmering frustrations over two decades of occupation, land confiscation, and settlement expansion. What began as spontaneous protests quickly evolved into a broad-based movement, coordinated by local committees and driven largely by ordinary Palestinians. The uprising was notable for its grassroots and collective nature. Palestinians from nearly every segment of society, men and women, students and workers, urban and rural communities, participated in demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, and acts of civil disobedience.

Israel’s response was severe and often brutal. The army and police used live ammunition, mass arrests, curfews, deportations, and a widely reported policy of “breaking bones” to suppress dissent. Human rights organizations documented thousands of injuries and hundreds of deaths among Palestinians, as well as widespread destruction of property. These harsh measures led many observers to see the Intifada as both a human tragedy and a symbol of Palestinian endurance.

²⁸ The 1936-39 Revolt in Palestine, Ghassan Kanafani.





The Second Intifada erupts in the shadow of the failures of the Oslo Accords, the ongoing occupations and a growing frustration among Palestinians over broken promises, economic hardship and inequality.

While a characteristically more militarized uprising, it maintained the collective nature of the Intifadas that preceded it. It brought Palestinian resistance once more into the spotlight and catapulted the Palestinian question back onto the global stage.

In Edward Said's commentary on



the Intifada, he notes on the nature of the Palestinian: People do not find the courage to fight continually against as powerful an army as Israel's without some reservoir, some deeply and already present fund of bravery and revolutionary self-sacrifice. Palestinian history furnishes a long tradition of these, and the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza have provided themselves generously from it.²⁹

Toward a Future of Justice and liberation

The Algerian revolution forced France to relinquish a settler colony after 132 years of domination. The South African anti-apartheid movement dismantled a system once deemed permanent. In each case, liberation was won not through passive appeals to

conscience but through a combination of mass mobilization, armed struggle, and international solidarity.

Resistance is not an end in itself. The goal is not perpetual war but liberation which leads to justice. Many Palestinians envision the day they are able to seek liberation and where they can claim what was stolen from them and be in a land where all inhabitants—Muslim, Christian, and Jewish—live with equal rights in a free Palestine, from the river to the sea. This vision stands in stark contrast to the exclusivist ethno-nationalism of the Israeli state and of Zionism.

As long as the structures of settler colonialism remain, resistance (including armed resistance) will continue. Palestinians resist because it's their fundamental right to their homes. They resist because it is their duty of guardianship towards their land which they all consider holy. They resist so that their children may one day walk to school without passing soldiers, so that olive trees may grow old without being uprooted, so that the call to prayer may rise over a land free of checkpoints.

When imagining liberation, we must relate it to liberation of mental and physical colonization of our world. The chains of Sykes-Picot need to be broken as much as our limitations in our imagination. To do that, Muslims and Arabs must study and reconnect with their history and tradition in an uninterrupted and highly critical manner. This is because the mainstream has convinced many that our history is unwritten and that our philosophy and tradition

are outdated and irrelevant. Only an uncorrupted mind can quickly see that is not true.

The world must decide whether to stand with the colonizer or the colonized, with erasure or with existence. To support Palestinian resistance is not to oppose peace; it is to affirm the very possibility of peace based on justice. Until that day arrives, every armed resistance, every popular uprising, every olive tree planted, every poem recited, every march and every boycott is a heartbeat of a nation that refuses to die.



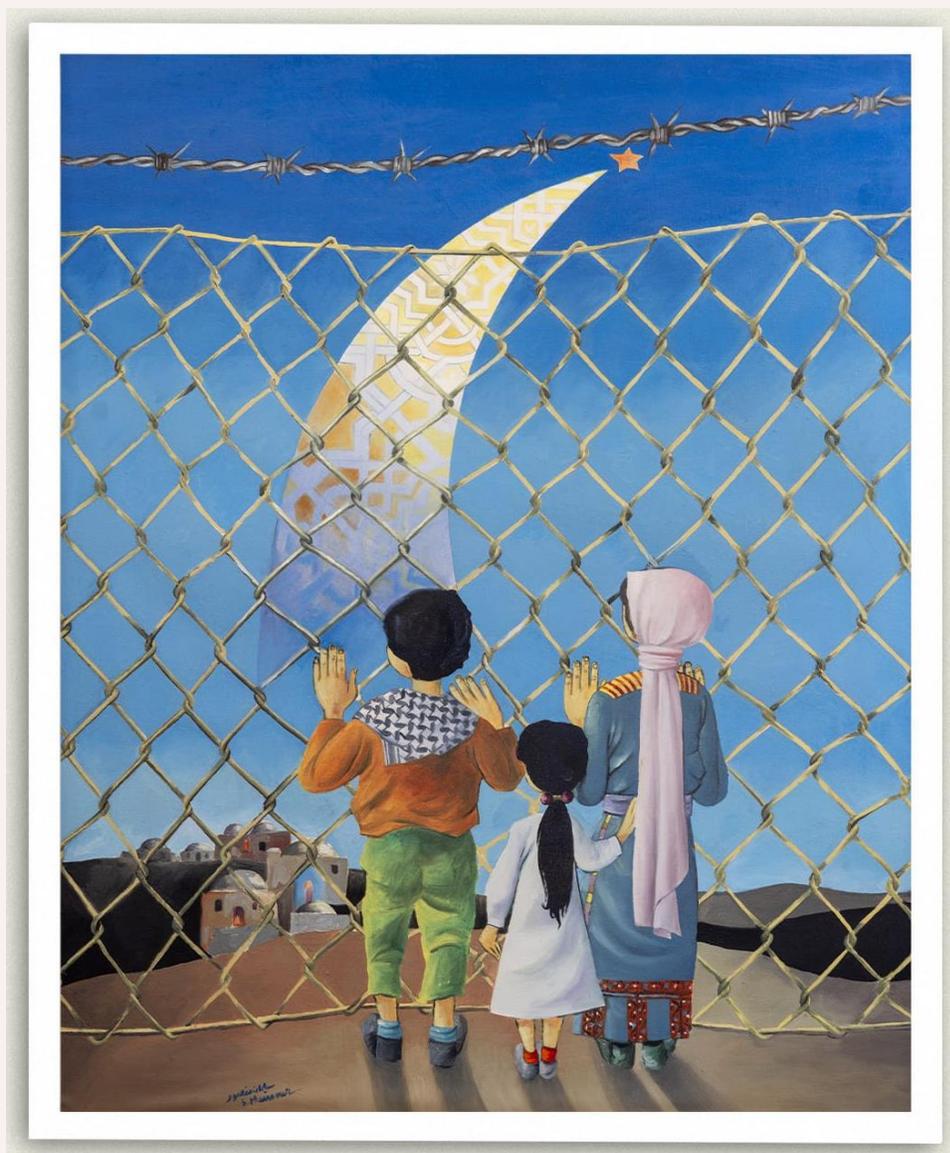
²⁹ Edward Said, Intifada and Independence, 1989
Page | 25



PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE IN THE LATE OTTOMAN PERIOD

Danielle

A rising urban elite class under the Ottomans in the late 19th century mastered the slow, indefinite work of negotiating imperial powers at the level of discourse, law, and representation. Albert Hourani's urban notable paradigm explains how political power in the late Ottoman Arab provinces, including Palestine, was mediated through a class of urban notables, who were wealthy families, landowners, merchants and religious leaders who acted as intermediaries between the Ottoman state and the local peasant populations. Shamikh Badra, a Palestinian scholar with a focus on Palestinian resistance studies, explores how this urban notable class engages in Indigenous Diplomatic Resistance ("IDR") as a new analytical framework for understanding Palestinian responses to Zionist settler colonialism that emerges in the late Ottoman period. Badra argues that Palestinians petitioning, lobbying, negotiations and press work from 1882-1914 were not secondary to armed struggle but a central resistance strategy. IDR is framed as political and diplomatic strategies that apply pressure, advocacy and resistance aimed at colonial powers. Badra uses a Foucauldian framework that applies IDR as 'counter-conduct', which is resistance emerging within the very systems that govern indigenous lives. These urban notables saw themselves as part of the fabric of the Ottoman system and they used that system to resist foreign penetration, as European consulates, missionaries



and Jewish settlers increased. Palestinian intellectuals, journalists, and notables cultivated diplomatic strategies that sought to expose and unsettle the normalization of the British and Zionist projects of governance. By petitioning Ottoman and later British authorities, producing newspapers, and forming political associations, Palestinians articulated counter-discourses that challenged the very epistemic frameworks through which imperial and colonial rule sought to render them governable subjects. This was not merely reactionary opposition but an affirmative

practice of subject formation, laying the groundwork for a national identity. Long before the armed revolt of the 1930s, Palestinians were already resisting by insisting upon recognition, inscribing themselves into the political field through a resistance that was as much intellectual as it was diplomatic.

This form of resistance from within; centered around petitions to Ottoman and European governing institutions denouncing the emerging Zionist project that began with the first waves of European Jewish settlers and subsequent land sales. These





petitions had some success throughout the late 19th century. As early as the 1870s, local residents of Jerusalem and Jaffa submitted petitions to the Ottoman provincial authorities complaining about the increasing presence of Jewish settlers (often from Eastern Europe) and requesting restrictions on land sales. In 1878 and 1886 Petah Tikva, one of the earliest Zionist colonies, was founded on land purchased near Jaffa. Local Arab villagers petitioned the Ottoman authorities in 1878 and again in 1886, warning that their livelihoods would be destroyed if peasants were displaced. In response, the Ottoman administration briefly annulled some land transactions and expelled certain settlers, though enforcement was inconsistent. In 1891, a group of leading Palestinian notables, including Yusuf Diya al-Khalidi (mayor of Jerusalem), sent a petition to Istanbul, demanding a halt to Jewish immigration and land sales. This is one of the most famous documented cases. The petitioners argued that Jewish immigration threatened the stability of Palestine and would eventually cause conflict. The Ottoman government responded by issuing tighter restrictions on foreign land ownership in Palestine, unfortunately, these were often circumvented.

Within Palestinian local society we also see cultural literary resistance emerge, a distinctly Palestinian Nahda (renaissance) in the form of literary essays. Print culture (newspapers, journals) became the main site for literary and intellectual exchange. What makes this literary Nahda distinct to



Palestine is that it is one of *adab maqalat* (a literature of periodicals) rather than *adab mu'allafat* (a literature of monographs/books). This distinction is useful as it leads us to question why Palestinian literature remained in this smaller form and how the Nakba disrupted the trajectory of the Nahda in Palestine, severing Palestinian literary production from its institutional base. So, while many would originally overlook the Palestinian literary scene of the period as non-developed, when one dives into the literary essays of the period we find a vibrant literary culture. Topics found in these essays included calls for education reform and women's emancipation; debates about modernization, Arab unity and cultural revival; and warning about Zionist settlement and British policies. These writings demonstrate that Palestinian intellectuals were not passive but fully engaged in modern Arab thought. The interruption of the Palestinian Nahda was severe, the

Nakba of 1948 destroyed much of the Palestinian literary infrastructure; many writers were displaced or silenced, leading to a break in the continuity of Palestinian intellectual life. Despite this interruption, it is important to highlight how Palestinians carved out intellectual and institution spaces of agency despite tightening colonial structures.³⁰

Before the devastation of the Nakba, the fall of the Ottoman Empire and subsequent British Mandate period (1917-1948) marks a momentous shift for the future of Palestine; and Palestinians would quickly realize it was not business as usual with their new British colonial oppressor. This era has been marked as one of disillusionment for our urban notables, whose success at navigating the Ottoman system would prove futile against the British support of the impending Zionist project. During their

³⁰ Abdou and Abu-Remaileh; A Literary Nahda Interrupted: Pre-Nakba Palestinian Literature as *Adab Maqalat* Page | 27





mandate, the British were wholly committed to their agenda of paving the way for creation of the Zionist state against all means necessary. Palestinian resistance had to shift, but it was not an immediate pivot, intellectuals and notables continued with their Indigenous Diplomatic Resistance: petitioning, negotiating but with the shift in governmental policy and as Zionist dual institutions matured, those same diplomatic tools lost efficacy. There is certainly validity to the criticism towards the Palestinian leadership during the British Mandate era, that their inefficiency and collaboration with the British did little to stop the Zionist project. Bassam Abun-Nadi offers a dynamic look at the Mandate urban notable class in his PreOccupation Podcast³¹; questioning ‘how is it these urban notables who navigated the Ottoman era so successfully failed so spectacularly as national leaders?’ Abun-Nadi offers an approach that explores education as the underpinning for understanding our urban notables and why they failed to bridge the urban-rural divide and raise the peasants against the British imperial project. He explores the two parallel Ottoman education systems: civil academies, which were fee-paying and for bureaucrats, producing parliamentarians; and military academies, which were free, merit-based and responsible for producing an officer class. Palestinian notables were graduates of the civil academies and would go on to implement their learned bureaucracy through Indigenous Diplomatic Resistance explored above, and who under the



mandate period became increasingly detached from peasants, who bore the brunt of land loss and colonial repression. Graduates of the military academy came from humble origins, from the peasant class, they gained key anti-colonial and insurgency education and would go on to become nationalist leaders in Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Jordan but not in Palestine. There were in fact no military academies in Palestine and with no military academies we are left with a peasantry that did not produce an officer class. The structural absence of military-trained elites explains much of Palestine’s leadership weakness under the Mandate. For Abun-Nadi, Palestine’s urban notables were not incompetent but rather they were supremely competent in all of the wrong things.

In her work, Rana Barakat explores how the British further sought to suppress local resistance by establishing a legal-political

framework that criminalized Palestinian resistance while legitimizing Zionist settler activity. This framework would use the courts, emergency regulations, and criminal codes to frame acts of anti-colonial resistance as ‘criminal’ violence rather than political struggle. This legal legacy ensures in Israeli military courts, which continue to criminalize Palestinian resistance under occupation. This leads to Barakat’s central question: Who decides whether Palestinians are criminals or martyrs, the colonial court or the resisting community? Peasant revolts, strikes and armed uprisings were prosecuted as banditry or terrorism, not anti-colonial resistance. This process was to establish a colonial discourse in which Palestinians appeared as irrational, criminal or fanatical; a narrative that would carry through in later periods.³² We can now observe the tightening colonial grip on Palestinian political agency; from negotiating within

³¹ A History of Palestinian Resistance Part 1 – A Sky with No Stars

³² Rana Barakat, Criminals or Martyrs? Let the Courts Decide! – British Colonial

Legacy in Palestine and the Criminalization or Resistance.





empire under the Ottomans, to structural exclusion and the building of parallel Zionist institutions to the legal criminalization of Palestinian resistance under the British and later the Zionist state of Israel.

The framework of Indigenous Diplomatic Resistance does not end with the Ottoman or Mandate periods. It continues to resonate in contemporary Palestinian history, where different communities have adapted IDR to their conditions. For Palestinians living within the 1948 borders of Israel, holding Israeli citizenship has not shielded them from displacement, dispossession, or erasure. Instead, their strategies of resistance often mirror the earlier petitions of the urban notables: legal challenges against discriminatory planning regimes, mobilization against home demolitions, and advocacy within the very courts and parliaments designed to marginalize them. Their counter-conduct emerges through lawsuits, protests, and political representation that contest the structures of citizenship and belonging imposed by the settler-colonial state.

In the diaspora, IDR has taken on a transnational character. Palestinians exiled after the Nakba and their descendants have persistently petitioned international forums, from the UN General Assembly to the International Court of Justice. They invoke Resolution 194 and the right of return, framing their struggle not only as a national one but as part of international law and global justice. Just as Yusuf Diya al-Khalidi and his contemporaries appealed to Istanbul against Zionist land acquisition, today's Palestinian organizations file

submissions, shadow reports, and amicus briefs in The Hague, insisting that the international system reckon with the displacement and dispossession of their people. This continuity demonstrates how Palestinians transform diplomatic resistance into a vehicle for asserting both historical rights and future claims.



Finally, non-Palestinian actors in the international community have also been drawn into the realm of IDR. The 2024 ICJ Advisory Opinion on Israel's prolonged occupation, along with South Africa's case alleging genocide, highlights how the question of Palestinian displacement has become a test case for the credibility of international law itself. Civil society networks, solidarity movements, and states invoking their obligations under the Geneva Conventions extend IDR beyond the indigenous community, amplifying Palestinian claims and pressuring institutions that once seemed impermeable. In this sense, IDR is no longer only a Palestinian strategy; it is also a mirror in which the international community must confront its complicity, its silences, and its responsibilities.

The study of Palestinian resistance in the late Ottoman and Mandate periods reminds us that our history is not reducible to reactions against Zionism, but is rooted in long traditions of self-assertion, governance, and intellectual

production. Generations of intellectuals, peasants, and notables who resisted Ottoman, British, and Zionist incursions demonstrate that Palestine has always been more than a site of dispossession; it has been a site of creativity, political imagination, and enduring struggle. To learn Palestine only through the lens of Zionism is to accept the very colonial erasure that has sought to make our people legible only as victims or obstacles. Instead, turning to our pre-Zionist histories, our autonomous experiments in governance, our intellectual Nahda, our diplomatic and peasant resistance, offers both a reclamation of dignity and a blueprint for the future. The lessons of that history will be indispensable in shaping a post-Zionist Palestine, one in which liberation is not merely about undoing dispossession but about reviving the deep, plural, and resilient traditions of Palestinian political and cultural life.





THE WATERS WE USED TO TREAD

Imane

The sea was calm that day.

The air was cool and damp, the sun was high and bright. The water in front of me stretched endlessly, smooth as glass. It felt as though the entire beach was holding its breath, the silence only broken by the soft ripples of water here and there.

And the buzzing of planes, of course. But who even hears those anymore?

I took a deep breath, the smell of salt filling my nostrils.

I'm not sure how long I stood there, to be completely honest.

It had become a bit of a daily occurrence, you see; a little after midday, when there was a bit of downtime, I would come to the beach, next to the Khan Yunis pier. Sometimes to walk, sometimes to look far into the sea, contemplating it from the shore.

It all felt wrong, somehow.

The sand between my toes felt nice, but to me, it was nothing compared to being on a boat, constantly having to adjust to the sea's movement to stay upright. I was used to being in the middle of it all, surrounded by waves.

Standing on the shore, it just felt *wrong*. It made me feel like I was an outsider, locked out of my own house.

"The fisherman is as much a part of the sea as the leaf is part of the tree," my father used to say.

"The waves dictate the rhythm of his heartbeats, the current carries

away his thoughts, and the water washes away his sins."

"How come, Baba?" I had asked him.

"Because a man cannot be surrounded by an immense blue sea without feeling the greatness of the God that created it," he told me.

And he was right.

Ever since I had stopped going out at sea, it was almost like the entire world was closing in on me. On the good days, nostalgia overtook me; on the bad ones, it became hard to breathe.

In those moments, I sometimes found myself wishing I had never felt the offshore wind flowing through my hair, the rough nets digging in my skin, the harsh sun mercilessly hitting saltwater-covered hands... I told myself that maybe, if I didn't know those feelings, I wouldn't miss them as much.

It's not like you can miss what you never had.



I walked along the waterline, careful not to step on the multiple creations littering the shore. Days were long and warm, and for many people, sand art was as good a way of passing the time as any. I slowly set towards home, looking around the streets of my neighborhood.

It was not a pretty sight; even without the ruins and rubble all over the place, it felt like the entire

soul of the town was sucked away. Gaza has never been this dull, not even when bombs and drones were more frequent. It made sense: knowing the building near you could collapse any second gave you all the more reason to keep moving. As a result, despite the cloud of death hanging over us, the city had felt *alive*. Now, without food to satisfy our hunger, it's difficult to stay upright.

Moving is completely out of the question for a lot of people.

You know, in a way, starvation is worse than being shot at.

You see, when shots are fired, there are gunshots and screams and wounds. When a bomb is dropped, there's fire and rubble and explosions. But when you starve to death?

It's quiet. It's silent.

And somehow, that makes it worse than a bomb or a gunshot, because it isn't quick. It isn't painless.

But it's still quiet.

Nothing can be done about it; it's not like you can outrun your own hunger. So the only thing left to do is to ignore the pull in your stomach.

But then the pull becomes a twist, and the twist becomes a cramp and the next thing you know, hunger is gnawing at you mercilessly, furious that it's being ignored. You look all around you, at the frail bodies, the dull eyes, the ashen skin. You see people fading away, little by little, and sometimes it feels like they'll just keep on fading until they've simply vanished from existence. But that's kind of the cruelest part, isn't it? Because they won't.

Vanish, I mean. No, they won't.





They'll just keep on getting frailer, thinner, weaker. Then, one day, you'll see jaws slack and a body grow limp. It's like I said; it's quiet. It's silent.

There is no scream, not even a whimper.

Just a dull, muted thud as the corpse hits the ground like a ragdoll.

Thud after thud after thud, people all around you will drop like flies, and you can bet the sound of their silent death will echo to the depths of your soul.

When I came home, I found my grandmother busying herself over a small pot of lentils.

The sight was almost unbelievable.

"Sitto!" I exclaimed, "Where did you even find this?"

She gave me a tired smile, the corner of her eyes crinkling lightly.

"One of the young men down the street managed to get it. He entrusted me with it, said he wanted to taste my lentil soup again."

My grandmother's lentil soup was ... Well, the best word I could use to describe it was *legendary*.

Back when food was more accessible, she would make pots and pots and leave the kitchen windows open, so the delicious smell of cumin and turmeric would travel all the way down the street. In those days, the neighbors knew to come knocking on our door, and she would gladly give them bowls and bowls.

I looked at the small pot, which probably wouldn't suffice to feed

our family, let alone the entire street.

But I saw *Sitto's* smile, the sparkle in her eyes, and I knew that it didn't matter.

To her, the idea of a full stomach and a hungry neighbor was much worse than starving to death herself.

Still. It didn't make me feel that much better.

Happy or not, my grandmother was still hungry. And so was my mother, and so were my siblings.

I left the house at once to get my mind off things.

Somehow, my feet carried me back to the beach, where I found my siblings busying themselves in the sand. The sight of them, sitting like that, was a punch to the gut.

How many sunny days did my family and I spend on this very shore? Drinking tea, eating peanuts and seeds, feeling the sun on our faces and the sand between our toes... The nostalgia hit me like a wave hits the hull of a boat, bubbling and breaking as it makes contact. Everything was so different now, wasn't it?

I sat down next to Anas, the eldest of my younger siblings. Well, strictly speaking, he was my cousin, but we were raised together. He lost his mother when he was still a baby. As for his dad, my uncle, he was killed alongside my father a year ago.

Still, Anas is my brother in every way that matters.

He was two years younger than me, and was getting annoyingly close to my height.

"Do you miss it?" he asked me, jerking me out of my thoughts.

"Do I miss it?" I repeated. "Miss what?"

He looked at me like he thought I was stupid.

"Fishing. The ocean." His voice cracked a little. "Your dad."

My voice wasn't as steady as I would have liked when I answered him.

"Yes. Do you?"

Anas and I used to accompany our dads on their boat, from time to time, when we weren't at school.

"Yes." I could feel his eyes on me as I absentmindedly watched the rest of my siblings, who were now playing with a ball near the shore.

I couldn't help but notice that even their games were...*slower*, somehow. Just looking at them sent another ache in my chest. Their movements were tired, sluggish. Their cheeks were thinning, their collarbones were more visible than ever. I swallowed my guilt and my pain, looking at the water once more.

It's particularly cruel that we had to grow hungry in this way.

Because, historically, such a fate rarely ever befalls people of the Mediterranean, does it? I mean, with a shore overlooking the endless blue sea, so full of life... It felt like having the entire world at arm's length, waiting to be seized by whoever is willing to risk it.

And yet. The *entire world* is at our *fingertips*, but somehow *just* out of reach. Actually, let's be honest. The





issue isn't that it's out of reach. It's still *right there*, at arm's length, except that our hands were cut off, just so we couldn't even *think* of reaching for it.

It forced us to depend on someone else to lend us a hand, but no one wants to. And the few helping hands that do extend towards us are immediately cut off as well.

And that leaves us on our own, some of us with only stumps left, others too scared to dare reach out, too scared to dare try, too scared to dare dream.

I could still feel Anas' eyes boring into the side of my head.

"Are you done staring?" I asked him, cocking an eyebrow. I felt my annoyance flare up when he kept staring, without answering. "Anas."

"You're going back out there, aren't you?"

My throat felt like it was made of paper; dry, itchy.

I burrowed my fists into the sand, feeling it seep in between my nails and my skin. "I want to," I admitted.

"Your mother will never let you. You know that, don't you?" He was still studying me intently. "Belal?" he tried again when I didn't answer.

I turned my body so I faced him completely, staring him dead in the eye.

"What other choice do I have?"

When I got back home, I waited until my siblings all went to bed, leaving Anas and me at the table. My mother busied herself washing some clothes in the sink, and my grandmother was on a chair,

mending a pair of pants. I figured there was no time like the present to pitch her my idea.

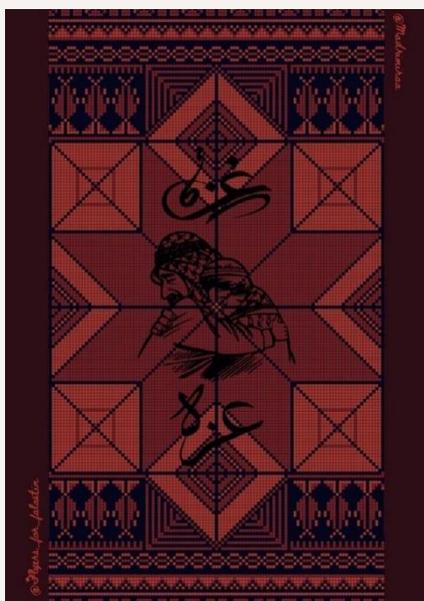
"Mama?" I started hesitantly. My mother just hummed in response. "I wanted to ask you something."

I took her silence as my cue to keep going.

"I spoke to 'Ammo Hossam yesterday, you know."

Across me, Anas rolled his eyes and gave me a look. "*Just tell her already*", his eyes seemed to say. I cleared my throat.

"He said that if Anas and I helped, we could manage to fix Baba's old boat by the end of the week."



I saw her pause for a second, but she kept on washing the shirt in her hands. I knew I had to get to the point, but I wasn't sure how well she would take it. And of course, Anas just *had* to take the matter into his own hands.

"Belal thought we could go back out at sea," he rushed out before I could stop him. I glared at him.

"*Belal thought? Really? Come on, we both know you're totally down to come along.*"

I saw *Sitto* go still at his words from the corner of my eye.

My mother let the clothes she was holding fall back into the sink with a *splash* and turned to face me.

"Absolutely not."

I winced, and my cousin made an "I-told-you-so" face at me, so I threw a towel at his head.

"Mama, just hear us out for a second," I pleaded, though I was satisfied with Anas' reaction to my words.

His face had that panicked look that clearly screamed, "*Us? What are you dragging me into this for?*"

My satisfaction didn't last long, though, since my mother wasn't keen on listening.

"Belal, it's dangerous, and you know it. I know you think you can help, and I appreciate that, but not at the cost of your life."

I sighed. "Mama, no one's going to die —"

But she slammed her hand on the table, not even letting me finish.

"Your dad and your uncle told me the same thing before they left. I *begged* them not to go, Belal. I *begged*. They still went out that day, and they never came back to us."

My grandmother's hands were shaking now, and I instantly felt a wave of guilt hit me. I shouldn't have brought this up in front of her.

Losing both her sons a year after she lost her husband was hard enough on her without me reminding her of it.





“Khalto,” started Anas, “there’s nothing to eat. We have to at least try, don’t you think?”

My mother sat next to him. “We’re all doing our best with what we’ve been given. We just need to be patient and trust that God will provide for us,” she lectured.

“Sanaa.” My grandmother’s voice was stern when she spoke, and my mom jumped like she forgot *Sitto* was in the room with us. “God will provide, yes. But we have to work for it.”

She looked at Anas and me, then smiled. “These two are right, you know? My husband fished to fill our stomachs, and so did my sons, and so will my grandsons if that’s what they wish.”

Anas grinned at her.

But the look in my mom’s eyes just kept on repeating what I already knew; she didn’t want us to go.

And you know what, as a general rule, my mother’s word is law.

But not this time. And I think she saw that, because her voice had a pleading note to it when she spoke.

“Habibi, please. You could die.”

“And if I don’t go, we *will* die.” At that point, I was getting angry. “Can’t you see?” I gestured towards the room my siblings were sleeping in. “They’re skin on bones! Just the other day, we heard one of Maryam’s classmates died from malnutrition! We can’t go on like this, Mama. I have to do something, *please*.” My mother wasn’t backing down, though.

“Then we’ll get food from the distributions, there are still some here and there, and—”

I cut her off.



“Mama. If we don’t die from hunger, then we get shot at while trying to get some of the food that is distributed. If not, then we get sick because there are drugs hidden in the flour, or the food is moldy because it stayed at the border for too long.

“Face it, mama. We’re already dying. If it’s not hunger, then it’s bullets, or bombs, or food poisoning or illness!” My voice was hoarse by that point.

My mother looked like she was on the verge of crying, but I couldn’t calm down enough to address it.

I refuse to let myself die, waiting for someone else to help.

I took a deep breath before speaking again.

“Anas and I, we both know how to fish”, I said in a much gentler tone. “We have a boat. We have nets.”

I reached across the table to grab my mother’s hand. “That’s more than any of the people around here have. Don’t you think we have a responsibility to try and help?”

My mother didn’t say anything after that, and Anas and I took that as our cue to go to bed.

The next day, Anas and I headed down to the port to meet Hossam Abu Taym, an old friend of my dad’s. He was the one who risked his life to retrieve my uncle and my father’s bodies from the water so that my family had something to bury, and he had lost his legs in the process. ‘Ammo Hossam didn’t like to talk about his injury, but Anas and I were nosy enough to piece the story together based on what we heard around the neighbourhood.

A year ago, *Baba*, ‘Ammo Abu Anas and ‘Ammo Hossam had been out early, hoping to get a good haul. They didn’t let Anas and me accompany them.

They spent hours out in the water and got a few good catches here and there, but it wasn’t nearly enough to feed three families. So, they wandered out as close to the boundary line as they could get without crossing it, and that’s when the bullets started raining down on them.

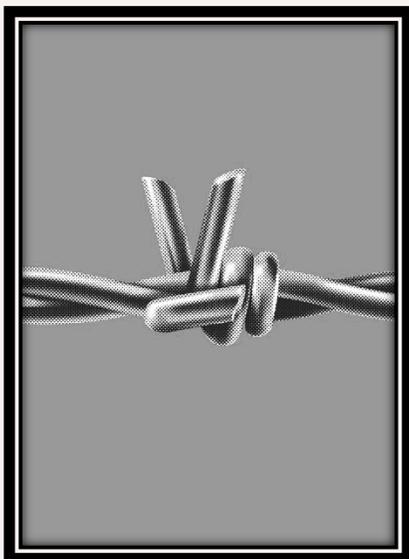




From here, the tale is a bit blurry; I was never able to ask for details, and no one volunteered them to me. I know my dad and my uncle were killed. I know 'Ammo Hossam did his best to take cover and bring the boat back, with both his best friends lying dead in it. I know he received a bullet right to the spine and nearly collapsed from the pain, but something kept him going. Some said it was adrenaline. Some said it was sheer stubbornness.

Either way, he came back to us, half-conscious, unable to stand on his feet, the boat riddled with bullet holes. It was a miracle from God himself that it hadn't sunk like a rock. Men had carried him to the nearest hospital while Jaafar watched, frozen from shock.

'Ammo Hossam has been in a wheelchair ever since.



Credit: The Palestine Poster Project Archives.

People said he lost a part of himself forever that day. I knew they meant something other than his legs, but I wasn't sure I completely understood.

The rest of the week was a blur of wood, nails and nets. As promised, 'Ammo Hossam was overseeing the repairs of the boat... and let's just say there was a lot of repairing to do.

For hours on end, he sent Anas and me all over the neighbourhood for supplies. We would go door to door, checking in to see if anyone had wood, duct tape, nails or tarp they could give us. Some families even had rope or old nets for us to use.

By the end of the week, our hands had callouses, rope burns and splinters, but we were ready.

'Ammo Hossam and his eldest son, Jaafar, circled the boat, inspecting our hard work.

The former nodded with a proud smile that made the corner of his eyes crinkle.

"You did good, boys. But," his voice took a stern tone when he saw Anas and me clapping each other on the back. "This isn't a game, okay? It could end very, very badly, even if you're being careful."

I gave him my brightest smile. "Don't worry, 'Ammo, we'll be okay *insha Allah*."

He shot me a weary look, but didn't say anything.

"So!" Anas clapped his hands together. "Shall we get going?"

'Ammo Hossam and Jaafar looked at each other, then at me, exasperated.

I clapped Anas on the shoulder. "The sun's about to set, we're better off waiting until morning."

My cousin shrugged, and we both headed home for the night.

My mom was asleep when Anas and I woke up at dawn the next day.

I didn't have the heart to wake her up, so I just headed to the kitchen.

I joined my cousin, who was quietly eating a small piece of stale bread that we had managed to get a few days earlier. Judging by the echoing silence in the room, nerves were starting to creep up on both of us. I stood up, my chair scraping against the wooden floor, and cleared my throat.

"Ready?"

He nodded, and we set off towards the shore.

Jaafar and 'Ammo' Hossam were waiting for us there, as convened. They had prepared water bottles and some bait for us and were making last-minute verifications when we arrived.

"There you are!" Jaafar exclaimed when he saw us. "Everything is good to go. Are you two ready?"

"Yup", confirmed Anas, who apparently had regained all of his confidence. "I can't wait to be back out there."

"Don't go out past six nautical miles from the coast", warned 'Ammo Hossam. "That's the limit set by the occupation. If you go past that point, you're dead."





“But,” protested Anas, “there isn’t much we can fish in that zone. We have to go further out, that’s where the real fish are!”

I silently agreed with him.

“He can’t be serious, can he?” asked Jaafar with an incredulous look on his face. He turned to Anas. “You can’t go out too far, you’ll get shot at immediately!”

I frowned. “But-”

‘Ammo Hossam raised his hand to cut me off. “No. It’s already dangerous enough as is. There’s no guarantee you’ll be safe even within the designated zone. For all we know, they could start firing at you on sight.”

He was right, of course. There wasn’t a single fisherman in Gaza who had never been shot at. The last time Anas and I went out to sea, we had been pelted with rubber bullets.

I had a purplish-red bruise the size of a clementine on my stomach, and it hurt to laugh for a week after that. It’s actually the reason most fishing families give up on their trade. It becomes too dangerous to continue.

Take Jaafar, for example.

He stopped fishing two years ago, after getting hit with rubber ammunition in the abdomen. I was fixing up nets on the pier when I heard people shouting, and I saw my father running past me with

Jaafar over his shoulder. There was a lot of blood.

Apparently, the soldier who shot him was close enough for the bullet to penetrate and cause internal bleeding. Jaafar had to get a job in construction after that.

I could tell he was thinking of that day too, because he was absentmindedly rubbing the spot right next to his navel.

‘Ammo Hossam was the one who snapped me out of my reverie.

“Alright, you two. Don’t be careless. Go out there, catch us some fish, and most importantly, come back *alive*.”

It wasn’t that encouraging, but it was honest.

Our odds of getting out of there completely unscathed were minimal at best, but it was better than nothing. Like I said, starving is worse than being shot at.

And I’ll take a clementine-sized rubber bullet bruise anytime if it means feeding our people.

Anas and I stepped into the boat and were on our way.

The skin of my hands was terribly dry due to the salty air and the sun, but it didn’t matter.

The sea wind made my hair whip wildly around my face, seagulls were screeching all around us, and I was the happiest I had been in an



entire year.

Credit: Naser Jafari, Al-Quds Newspaper.

Anas was the same, looking back at the white sand littering the shore.

A wide grin split my face. Everything was back to normal.

I came back to my senses rather quickly, however. We didn’t run around half of Khan Yunis for a week to fix up this stupid boat just to daydream here all day. I lowered a bucket into the water and splashed a good amount directly in Anas’s face.





He froze completely, then started sputtering and coughing up the water he swallowed.

I bent over, wheezing from laughter.

“Alright,” I panted, still laughing, “we have a job to do. Stop daydreaming and let’s— hey!” I cried out as he wrestled the now-empty bucket out of my hands.

The bucket was filled, then emptied again, and it was my turn to swallow a mouthful of saltwater.

“How’s that for daydreaming?” he mocked, while I bent over again, this time to cough and spit out the salt water I had inhaled thanks to my *lovely* cousin.

“Okay, fine,” I said once I could breathe again, “I deserved that. But we didn’t come here to act like clowns, did we? Grab that net and come on.”

Anas — for once in his life — did as he was told, and we quickly fell back into a comfortable rhythm.

Five hours after leaving the coast, however, when the nets we had set up came back empty save two or three small fish, the exhilaration of being back on a boat died down a little.

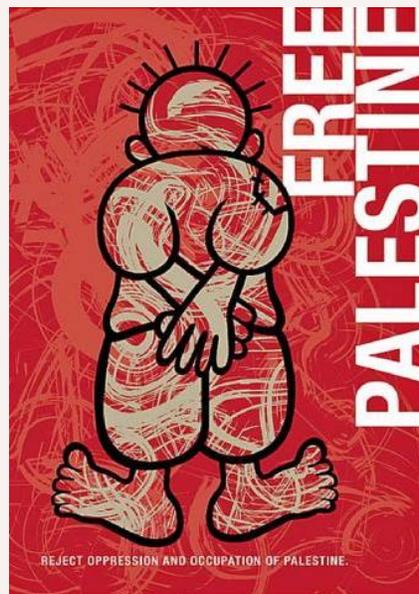
Anas groaned as the third net he pulled up turned out to have three tiny mullet fish caught in it.

I shot him a look, but I couldn’t help feeling a little disappointed myself. We had set off, hoping to come back with at least twelve to fifteen kilos of fish.

What we managed to catch didn’t even amount to a full kilogram.

“This is so stupid! I don’t know why we keep trying — we all know there’s not much to fish this close to the shore. We should be out there, closer to the rocks and the reef.” Anas groaned, dropping into his seat.

I sighed, frustrated. “I know. But we’ve been really lucky so far. There hasn’t been a single Israeli boat since we set out. We might actually make it back in one piece.”



Credit: *The Palestine Poster Project Archives.*

“Exactly! So, I say we push our luck just a *little* further and catch something that might *actually* fill our stomachs,” he reasoned.

I bit the inside of my cheek.

“Don’t go out past six nautical miles from the coast”, ‘Ammo Hossam had said. “If you go past that point, you’re dead.”

I touched my stomach, where I had gotten that clementine bruise last time. We were only four nautical miles from the shore on that day.

“Okay,” I said. “Okay. Let’s go catch some real fish.”

We found our luck when we were well offshore — around twenty nautical miles from the coast at least. The second net felt heavier than normal as we pulled it out of the water. I couldn’t help the small bubble of hope that was bursting in my chest.

After a few minutes of grunting and struggling, when we finally got the net on board, it looked like an entire school of *balamita* was tangled in its knots.

I met my cousin’s wide eyes, shell-shocked. *There had to be at least twenty kilos in there!*

The look on his face was so astounded, I couldn’t help it. I splashed a bucket of water on his face, again.

He spluttered and spat into the water and glared at me.

If looks could shoot harpoons, I’d be a shish-taouk skewer right now.

“Come on, brother, grab your line,” I grinned. “If we caught this many,



there must be an entire school nearby.”

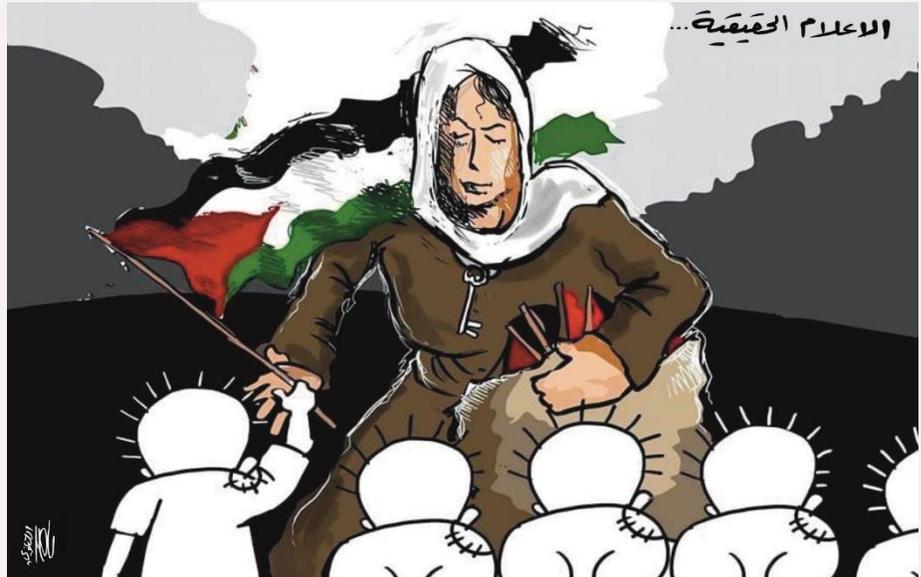
It turned out to be one of our most fruitful hours of fishing ever. We told each other stories as we waited for the fish to bite, in between cries of “Wait, hold that thought, something’s biting!”, followed by elated cries when we inevitably pulled up more and more Atlantic bonito, or *balamita* as we called them.

Anas talked about *Jeddo*, our grandfather, and how he would complain about the restricted fishing zone.

“I understand what he meant now,” he said pensively. “There’s barely any fish left in that area. We’re much better off here. Besides, *Jeddo* always said it was our right to fish wherever we want. The Oslo accords gave us access to up to fifteen nautical miles offshore, right?”

“Twenty,” I corrected.

I then told Anas some stories *Sitto* told me of when she was young; how her own grandfather (“That would make him our great-grandpa, right?” said Anas, at which point I corrected: “No, stupid, our great-great grandpa. Now stop interrupting me!”) would fish for hours on end, and give some to his wife (“Our great-great grandma!”, “Yes, Anas. Can I continue now?”). Then, on Friday mornings, she and her friends would head out early to reach Jerusalem by midday, right on time to sell their husbands’ fish to the people who were leaving the *masjid* after *jumu’ah*.



Credit: Naser Jafari, Al-Quds Newspaper.

“Here comes the old ladies of Gaza with their fish”, the locals would say. “And by God, you will never taste a fish fresher, better than the one these women bring to us.”

Sitto told me that they never ran out of customers; in an hour, her grandmother and her friends’ entire haul of fish would be gone. As she grew older, she went to Jerusalem with her grandmother a few times. Eventually, with the blockade, it became too difficult to come in and out of Gaza. *“The people of Jerusalem miss our fish,” Sitto had said confidently. “It will be a happy day for them and for us when the doors of the Old City open up again for the old fishermen’s wives.”*

“It’s cruel,” murmured Anas when I finished the story. “They cut us off from each other. And now, even if the blockade is lifted, it’s not like we can go fish like we used to, with bullets flying around.” Most of our fishers took up construction work once they realized the newfound danger of going out at sea. It wasn’t worth it anymore; there was barely anything worth catching within the allowed fishing zone, and even that

was dangerous. Going any further was a death sentence.

“But we’ll be fine,” I reminded myself. “No need to worry.”

“It is cruel,” I answered Anas once I snapped out of my thoughts. The occupation knew exactly what they were doing; freedom on land and freedom on the sea were one and the same for us. The blockade, the restricted fishing zone? It was like cutting a lifeline.

I felt the line tense in my hands.

“Anas,” I exclaimed, “I got one!”

He did too, and we pulled out a couple more fish that way, talking and discussing pretty much anything, interrupting each other to cry out whenever we got caught some fish.

We decided to stop when our total haul reached almost forty kilograms.

After a while, we were nearing the Khan Yunis coast, where Jaafar and ‘Ammo Hossam were surely waiting for us.





“They’ll be absolutely furious when they find out we came so far out,” I winced as Anas voiced my exact thought.

“Yeaaah, let’s not think about that right now.” I grinned at my cousin. “One day,” I promised him, now looking at the horizon, “you and me, we’re going to sail all along the Gaza coastline, and we’ll stop on every beach we see.”

It was said that no two beaches of Gaza are the exact same. It was my lifelong dream to visit every one of them.

“Sounds like a plan,” came my cousin’s voice from behind me.

I whirled around, only to be met with a wall of water splashing in my face. *Again.*

I choked on the water and spat it out directly in Anas’s face. I wasted no time in getting my revenge, obviously, and he soon had a bucket of saltwater thrown in his face, too. He looked like a *complete* idiot; drenched, a wide smile on his face, eyes squinted because of the sun, a barely alive *balamita* flopping and thrashing next to his shoe.

To be completely fair, I’m sure I didn’t look much better, but at that moment, I frankly didn’t care.

All that mattered was that we were both alive, back in the water and with a pile of fish at our feet.

We were on top of the world.

And that’s when the bullets came raining down.

A sharp, crushing pain shot through my back as the air was knocked out of my lungs. It felt like a metal bat or a sledgehammer had punched the bottom of my spine, and it was like being on fire and electrocuted all at once. My knees jerked and spasmed, and I fell face-first on the bottom of the boat.

I heard a scream not far next to me.

“ANAS!” I yelled at the top of my lungs. “ANAS!”

I tried to get up, but it was like my legs were made of lead.

“*Come on, you idiot,*” I screamed at myself, in my head. “*Come on. COME ON, COME ON, MOVE!*”

Nothing happened. The pain in my back was excruciating, but I could only feel a bit of tingling in my legs. Then, nothing. My breaths were coming in short bursts now, their rhythm picking up.

“*You were just knocked down,*” said my brain. “*Get up, you’re okay.*”

“*I can’t!*” I cried out in return

“*Just get up, Anas needs your help. Yallah, get up. GET UP!*”



But I couldn’t move.

I let out a scream of frustration and pounded with my hands on the floor around me. I lifted my head as much as I could, and what I saw

made me forget the lack of feeling in my legs.

“ANAS!” I screamed and unconsciously tried to stand up, to no avail.

The top half of my cousin’s face was covered in blood. I couldn’t see his eyes, but they looked closed.

The firing stopped. They must’ve thought we were dead.

Still on the floor, I picked up a stray bullet.

Steel, with rubber coating.

Quite the damage.

“Anas,” I sobbed. “Wake up, brother. Please.”

“Wake up, I can’t stand up, please wake up.”

The pain in my back dulled to a deep ache, but my lower body was still numb, absent.

“Anas, please,” I begged. “Come on, I promise you can throw another bucket of water at my face and I won’t say or do anything. Please. Please.”

My breathing was speeding up again, and I didn’t last too long before I blacked out.

Word is that some of the men who worked near the pier came to get us. They got us out, cleaned the blood off all the fish we had caught and had it distributed to everyone who needed it.

It fed a lot of people.





I was unconscious when we got back, so I didn't get to see just how angry 'Ammo Hossam or Jaafar were at us for not listening to them.

But that's okay, because Jaafar made sure to come yell at me as soon as I left the hospital.

I felt terrible, which felt good, in a way, because it was better than feeling nothing like I had in the past few days.

The next time I saw 'Ammo Hossam, we were both in matching wheelchairs.

He stared at me for a moment.

"How's Anas?" he asked me, his voice rougher than usual.

"He hasn't left his bed. I think he's better, though."

My voice sounded hollow even to my own ears.

'Ammo nodded, then turned away without a word. I think he blames himself for what happened to us.

They say 'Ammo Hossam had lost a piece of himself forever the day that bullet hit his spine. I understand exactly what that meant now.

My mouth was dry when I wheeled myself back to the house.

Thankfully, my mother wasn't home. I hadn't been able to look her in the eye since I got back.

I found Anas, stumbling out of the kitchen on wobbly legs.

"Belal?" I heard him call, tentatively.

"I'm here," I croaked out.

I wheeled forward until I reached him, then put his hand on the back of my chair.

He pushed me out of the house, and we headed towards the beach. Our progress was slow; my chair wasn't very easy to wheel on dusty, rocky paths like the one we were taking, but Anas patiently pushed me, and I patiently gave him directions.

We reached the beach, and Anas felt the sand with his hand before lowering himself to the ground.

I looked down at my legs and tried to make my toe twitch. Nothing.

My cousin would have to run for both of us now.

"Does it still smell like salt?"

I jerked out of my thoughts at his question. The bullets that hit him took away his sense of smell, and I found myself noticing the scents around me a lot more now. There were so *many*, yet I had never truly noticed until a few days ago.

"Yeah, it smells like salt. And algae."

I looked out at the sea. I would never go on a boat again. My world was now limited to how far I could wheel myself or how far someone could push me in this chair. I stared at my cousin.

Anas's eyes were closed, his mouth drawn in a small frown.

The sun would never rise again in his world. He would never get to see all of Gaza's beaches and decide if they really *are* all different from one another.

"Belal?" he asked me again in that small, very un-Anas-like voice.

"Yeah?" I answered in a just as un-Belal-like tone.

"Am I facing the water?"

My throat was dry.

"Yeah," I murmured. "Yeah, you are."





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